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SERMONS

BY

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SERMON I.

ON THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD.

Pſalms xvi. 8. *I have ſet the Lord always before me: becauſe he is at my right hand, I ſhall not be moved.*

THE pſalm, from which theſe words are taken, is, for its excellence, ſtiled Michtam, which ſignifies a wedge of pure gold. It is ſuppoſed by moſt interpreters to be prophetic; at leaſt, to contain ſome ſecret reference to the Meſſiah, under the perſon of David; as it breathes much of a Chriſtian ſpirit, and ſtrongly expreſſes that joyful confidence in a bleſſed immortality, which it is the diſtinguiſhing glory of the Goſpel to

 inſpire.

inſpire. Accordingly the apoſtle Peter, in his ſermon on the day of Pentecoſt, aſſumes it as a prophecy of our Saviour's reſurrection.

But to wave this argument:—whether the pſalm is allowed to be prophetic or not, it cannot be denied to be very inſtructive and affecting.

The principal image preſented to our view is that of a good man, contemplating the peculiar felicity of his lot under the protection of Divine Providence.—While he is thus employed, his heart expands at once with gratitude, benevolence, and ſublime joy: a ſtate of mind which, he aſſures himſelf, ſhall be as laſting as it is delightful; ſince it is built upon a foundation that can never fail. And where can we look for this ſubſtantial and durable happineſs but in the boſom of the Father of mercies;—that Great Being "who is without va-

"riableneſs

" riableneſs or ſhadow of turning;" and whoſe favour perpetually encompaſſeth the upright? " I have ſet the Lord " always before me; becauſe he is at " my right hand, I ſhall not be moved."

That God is every where preſent, that he beholds our moſt retired actions, that he looks into our inmoſt ſouls, and that not a thought or a ſenſation paſſes there which can eſcape his notice;— we are aſſured, not only by the declarations of ſcripture but by the dictates of reaſon, which concur in aſſerting the univerſality of Providence. And what a ſolemn thought is this! The eye of infinite purity and wiſdom is every moment upon us, wherever we are, and whatever we do! It is a thought which would be apt to overwhelm the mind, were we not aſſured that the holieſt of beings is alſo the beſt and the moſt merciful; " that he knoweth our frame, " and remembereth that we are duſt;"

and that his favour dwelleth with the humble. Still we cannot but be awed by the apprehended preſence of God. All the glories of the world vaniſh before it; and one grand object takes poſſeſſion of the ſoul.

But how, my brethren, ſhall I find words, on a ſubject ſo intereſting and ſublime, to fill your hearts and my own with adequate impreſſions?

Teach us, thou ever-preſent, all-knowing Father, to conceive of thee aright! Keep our minds from being darkened by ſenſe and paſſion! Make us remember that thou beholdeſt all continually, and wilt reward the good at laſt!

God is made known to us by his works. Thence we derive the moſt convincing evidence of his perfections, as

as well as of his exiſtence. His image is impreſſed upon the things which he has made. The regularity, the harmony, which reign throughout all nature, exhibit a plan of univerſal goodneſs, executed with unerring ſkill; demonſtrate the hand of a moſt wiſe and benevolent Parent. — Do not then the grandeur and magnificence of the creation ſhew, in like manner, that the power of God is unbounded, and his being immenſe? Lift up your eyes, and ſurvey the glorious vault of heaven! Look at the ſun, that prodigious orb, many thouſand times bigger than the whole earth which we inhabit! Contemplate the firmament of ſtars, which are, moſt probably, ſuns that enlighten worlds as large or larger than our own, and filled equally with inhabitants! Behold theſe ſuns and worlds ſpread abroad through immeaſurable ſpace, innumerable as the ſands upon the ſea ſhore!

After this ſurvey, can it be neceſſary to prove that the architect of this vaſt univerſe, which diſdains all limit, is no local deity—not the genius of this valley, or that mountain; the inhabitant of the ſubterraneous or the ethereal regions; the guardian ſpirit of the ocean, or the land? He—who ſtretched out the heavens above the earth, and ſpread their ſhining hoſts over the vaſt expanſe—He, who gave birth to all worlds, with the beings which inhabit them—and at whoſe pleaſure they revolve throughout the immenſity of ſpace—can be himſelf confined within no limits. "There is no end of his greatneſs." He is vaſt beyond conception, and glorious above praiſe.

What, indeed, ſhould circumſcribe the Great Firſt Cauſe, or prevent his preſence, and his activity, from being univerſal? Conceive of God as the fountain of being, whence all nature ſprung, himſelf

himſelf derived from no foreign cauſe; poſſeſſing, in his divine eſſence, active principles, which, from all eternity, have burſt out into thoſe ſtupendous energies that people the infinity of ſpace, and adorn it with the workmanſhip of heaven;——otherwiſe, night and ſilence would have held their everlaſting reign over the boundleſs void.——Why then, amidſt this void, ſhould the holy fire of the ſupreme intelligence blaze forth in one region, and not in all? What region can boaſt any peculiar relation to the deity? No, we muſt allow that the Eternal Spirit is univerſal. All things are in God, and God in all. "His preſence fills the immenſe circle "of the heavens." "Before him the "inhabitants of the earth are as graſs-"hoppers;" the ocean is as a drop of water; and "the nations are as the "ſmall duſt of the balance." "Whi-"ther ſhall I go from thy ſpirit? Whi-"ther ſhall I flee from thy preſence?"

" Behold the heaven, even the heaven
" of heavens, cannot contain thee."

But if the Supreme Being be every where preſent, then it follows that he muſt be every where conſcious; and that the infinity of ſpace is the " ſenſo-
" rium of the God-head." Nor let us imagine that the views which he takes of his creatures are leſs particular and minute than they are general and extenſive. For ſtill, reaſoning from his works to himſelf, we have equal ground to be aſtoniſhed, whether we riſe to what is grand and magnificent, or deſcend to what is ſmall and almoſt imperceptible. The one ſurpaſſes our comprehenſion as much as the other.

We behold around us a glorious firmament of ſtars, whoſe diſtances, and magnitudes, and motions, tranſcend the powers of human imagination. We have reaſon to believe that beyond theſe there

there are other firmaments; and others, probably, beyond them, without limits. For wherever God exiſts there muſt be worlds and creatures to ſhare his bounty. —If we deſcend to the diminutive objects of nature, we diſcover in a blade of graſs, in the bloſſom of a tree, in the wing of an inſect, a frame ſo exquiſitely finiſhed, as if this ſingle object were deſigned to be the maſter-work of the creation, and all the cares of providence were laviſhed upon it alone. Beſides, by the invention of glaſſes, we have brought new worlds to light, which mock our feeble powers by their minuteneſs, as the heavenly bodies by their magnitude. We ſee forms of life, powers of motion, (and, no doubt, there are organs of ſenſation too), ſwarming innumerable, in the compaſs of a drop of water, or a grain of ſand. Where ſhall we ſtop? The world we live in is but a grain of ſand in compariſon of the heavenly hoſts; and there are, poſſibly, beings exiſting, to which a grain of ſand may be a univerſe.

With

With what reverence ſhould we look up to him, who built the earth, and eſtabliſhed the pillars of heaven, who has created unnumbered ranks of being,—animal,—human,—angelic,—riſing from the confines of nothing to his eternal throne,—who alſo cheriſhes the meaneſt particle of life that glows in his dominions; who watches over every one of his ſervants with equal vigilance, as if there were no other object in the univerſe; and without whom not a "hair "of their heads can periſh!"

If it be difficult to conceive of ſuch amazing knowledge, ſo extenſive, yet ſo minute; this is to be aſcribed to our weakneſs. Even our own frame is to us an inexplicable myſtery. We know not the nature of the human mind; much leſs can we comprehend the eternal ſpirit. Man is confined to a very ſmall portion of ſpace, and capable of perceiving and

and acting only through the organs of the body. But we ſhould conſider that man is, not improbably, of the very loweſt order of rational beings. The next order above us may have higher powers, more extended proſpects, and a larger ſphere of action, comprehending vaſt and aſtoniſhing tracts both of ſpace and time.

For who can believe that Supreme Wiſdom, after creating ſuch an infinite variety of beings, animate and inanimate, could ſtop at the firſt imperfect ſketch of rational exiſtence?—That when there are ten thouſand orders, governed by no law but that of inſtinct, there ſhould be but one ſolitary child of reaſon---this reaſon as oft the ſport of error as the guide to truth; and the intellectual and moral world far leſs complete than the world of mere ſenſe or inanimate matter?---If therefore it be reaſonable to conclude that there is a gradation of beings ſuperior to man, riſing above all limit and conception;

tion; and if, in proportion to their rank, their knowledge and comprehenſion increaſe; then to the great ſource of all we can attribute no leſs than a comprehenſion which is univerſal; extending to every individual through the whole circle of exiſtence; conſcious to every motion in the material world, and to every thought in the intellectual; and embracing equally the paſt, the preſent, and the future.

If then, my brethren, God be every where both preſent and conſcious, there can be no event which does not fall under his notice, which muſt not obtain his permiſſion. Conſequently, all things are conducted by the meaſures of infinite wiſdom, and directed to the purpoſes of perfect goodneſs. The moſt diſcordant elements are bound together in ſocial harmony; the wildeſt ſallies of paſſion are rendered ſubſervient to general order and felicity; and from events the moſt calamitous flow the moſt extenſive and durable

able bleſſings. Amidſt all ſeeming deviations, there is one great and benevolent deſign carried on; one inviſible but irreſiſtible energy which pervades all beings; conducting the willing and compelling the averſe agreeably to the counſels of his infinite mind, "of whom, and through "whom, and to whom, are all things; "the ſame yeſterday, to-day, and for "ever."

Further—If God be every where conſcious, then, as there is "no darkneſs, or "ſhadow of death," where the workers of iniquity can eſcape detection; ſo neither is there any region where the virtues of the humble can be loſt in obſcurity. Though concealed from every human eye, and removed beyond the reach of all human power, we are ſtill encircled by the Divinity. In health and in ſickneſs; amidſt our ſocial and ſolitary hours; through all the ſtages and viciſſitudes

tudes of life; even when we paſs through the valley of death, and enter upon the vaſt unknown, which lies beyond it,—the eye of God is upon us. Not external actions and events alone are open before him; he penetrates the ſoul; beholds every thought before it riſes; perceives every ſenſation which thrills through our frame, and hath as perfect a knowledge of all our ſinful, all our virtuous diſpoſitions, as we have in our own breaſts. He is preſent to us as much as we are to ourſelves. "In him we live, and move, and "have our being." "He is acquainted "with all our ways; there is not a word "upon our tongues, but he knoweth "it altogether; he underſtandeth our "thoughts afar off."

Hence that impartial regiſter of all human actions, words, and thoughts, reſerved for the great and final day of retribution.

Placed in this awful ſituation,—a juſt though merciful God always beholding us,—and the allotments of eternity awaiting his ſentence,—ſhould we not labour to maintain a lively ſenſe of our ſituation, and ſtrive to make the impreſſion conſtant and habitual? If God be ever preſent with us, ſhould we not "ſet him continually before us?"

For, did we duly reflect that he who formed this labyrinth (the heart) looks through all its windings, it would be impoſſible for us to harbour one unjuſt or unbenevolent deſign. On the other hand, conſcious of the Deity within us, and around us; and looking upon ourſelves, and the whole univerſe, as his temple; a preſence ſo auguſt muſt elevate and ennoble the ſoul. The ſoldier, fighting beneath the eye, or near the perſon, of his prince, has often done wonders of valour. But when we can look up to the greateſt of beings, not as

ſubjects

ſubjects to a prince, but as children to a parent; when, upon every emergency, we can have recourſe to an inviſible but ever watchful friend; and, by humble prayer, draw countenance and protection from him who has all the heavenly hoſt at his command—who can annihilate every danger in a moment, or infuſe into us ſuch ſtrength of mind as will cauſe us even to enjoy the danger—what encouragement, what ſtrong conſolation, will this give to virtue and integrity, however depreſſed! "If God be for us, "who can be againſt us?" If with filial reverence we fear God, we have cauſe to fear none beſides him. "While he is at "our right hand we ſhall never be "moved."

I conclude with one reflection more. What joy or what anguiſh attends the thought of God's omnipreſence, as we are conſcious of habitually pleaſing or offending him?

To

To the wicked God appears as an enemy; to the righteous as a friend. The wicked are conſcious that they have expoſed themſelves to his juſt diſpleaſure; to be ſurrounded with his preſence, therefore, is to be ſurrounded with terrors. All nature is ſubject to him; and there is nothing which he cannot employ as an engine of their puniſhment. Their bodies he can fill with pain; their minds with remorſe: and every gleam of pleaſure, every moment of eaſe, which they enjoy, is the effect of his long-ſuffering.

To them life, as it advances, grows more gloomy; and all beyond it is a confuſed proſpect of unknown evils.

While earth is ſinking beneath them, they even would look up to heaven, but dare not. An unſeen hand impels them to the extreme verge of mortality. There they would linger in agonies for ever;

but the reluctant ſoul is forced out of its ſhattered dwelling, and launched—it dreads, but knows not whither.

To the good man, on the contrary, the univerſal preſence of God is a ſpring of perpetual comfort. It brightens the whole aſpect of nature; renders every occurrence more intereſting and delightful; and gives a higher reliſh to every enjoyment of life. All appears full of benevolence, becauſe full of God.

The happineſs of the good man is ſincere; and improves his heart inſtead of corrupting it, becauſe it reminds him of the fountain whence it flows.

And as in God he enjoys an inexhauſtible fund of comfort, ſo he finds a refuge under every affliction. With a ſerene and cheerful mind he paſſes through life; and even in death he will fear no evil. Let the mountains ſhake, and nature

ture tremble; let the ſtars fall from the firmament, and the heavens depart with a great noiſe; yet, while "God is his "ſtrength, and the moſt high God his "Redeemer," he can lift up his head with confidence, "knowing that his redemp-"tion draweth nigh."

Though it may ſtrike with awe, and even with terror, the moſt pious mind, to behold theſe grand diſplays of omnipotence; yet to one, who has through life "ſet God continually before him," the awe will be tempered with hope, the terror with joy; and this hope ſhall not be cut off, this joy ſhall endure for ever.

SERMON II.

ON FAMILY DEVOTION.

Acts x. 2. *Cornelius a devout man, and one that feared God with all his houſe, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.*

FROM the example of this good centurion, who is here mentioned with ſuch high commendations, and who, as appears from the ſequel, was ſo ſignally rewarded, we may, not improperly, turn our thoughts upon the ſubject of family-devotion. A duty which, in an age diſtinguiſhed rather by extent of knowledge than by warmth of zeal, is too ſeldom allowed that degree of attention which it deſerves.

It has indeed, for ſome time, been a common complaint, among the religious obſervers of the world, that the appearance of piety, which ſtill lingers in our public aſſemblies, has been almoſt baniſhed from our private families, where it uſed to flouriſh as one of their moſt valuable hereditary ornaments; and, though not perhaps openly ridiculed or inſulted, is, however, treated with an air of indifference; ſometimes, it is to be feared, regarded with ſilent contempt; and, of courſe, made to give place not only to the ſerious purſuits, but even to the common amuſements, of the world.

Whether or not it would appear, by comparing the arguments in favour of family devotion with the objections againſt it, that there is any rational foundation for the neglect and contempt into which it is fallen; or, on the contrary, that the conſtant practice of it would unſpeakably contribute to our ſatisfaction and im-

provement; it is certainly worth our while to examine all which can be urged on either ſide with impartiality and candour; and, having done this, no one can deny that it will be our wiſdom and our duty to follow the deliberate conviction of our underſtandings.

Firſt, then, let us make every favourable allowance for thoſe who have not been quite ſo religious in their families as one would hope they are in their own hearts. It cannot be denied that many prejudices have, not without ſome degree of juſtice, been raiſed againſt family devotion, by the unpleaſing manner with which it is ſometimes accompanied, the tedious length to which it has been frequently protracted, and the unbecoming behaviour of many by whom it may have been ſcrupulouſly practiſed. Nor ſhould we diſſemble, that theſe circumſtances, reſpectively conſidered, have

probably rendered it, in the general apprehenſion of the world, irkſome and unpleaſant, inconvenient and incompatible with attention to buſineſs, or even thrown upon it the odium of hypocriſy; and all together may have contributed to bring it into diſuſe. For beſides theſe objections I know of no other.

But if the nature of domeſtic piety have been miſtaken or perverted, let ſuch pernicious errors be expoſed and rectified; let the authors of them be pitied and forgiven; but let not religion itſelf be deſpiſed for their folly, or reproached with their guilt; nor let thoſe ſacred duties be abandoned which tend to recommend it to our hearts, and diffuſe it through our families, if for no other reaſon, yet for this—that without the light of religion to guide us, notwithſtanding the noble capacities and ſublime affections of our nature, we ſhall be found

a poor, miſerable, contemptible race of beings.

Far be it from us to recommend, or to excuſe, the conduct of thoſe who entirely ſacrifice the pleaſures and duties of domeſtic and ſocial life to an auſtere and ſuperſtitious exerciſe of devotion. Such perſons are the very worſt enemies religion ever had. That piety which is genuine will throw a luſtre upon the life of man, inſtead of ſpreading a gloom over it; will invigorate, inſtead of deadening, the faculties of the ſoul; will ſtrengthen, not impair, the generous affections; and, far from ſuperſeding, will enforce all the moral obligations of our nature.

It is true, the moments of devotion may not always glide with the ſame rapid courſe as thoſe which are allotted to ſocial entertainments, though they will often fill the ſoul with the divineſt joys. The grandeſt objects cannot always elevate;

vate; the moſt tender and affecting ſometimes fail to move. And therefore it is of the higheſt importance, in order to avoid that languor and diſguſt ſo incompatible with all the noble and tender emotions which belong to religion, that the ſeaſons conſecrated to theſe ſacred purpoſes ſhould be limited by a due regard to the faculties of human nature as well as to the circumſtances of human life. Not to mention that it is more reverent in itſelf, and more agreeable to our Saviour's example, to addreſs the Supreme Being in a few ſolemn words than run into vain and unmeaning repetitions: "God is in heaven, and thou upon "earth; therefore let thy words be "few."

Could this great point be carried, every objection would at once be anſwered; and, what is of much greater importance, every deſire of making objections taken away. One might preſume to hope that the

the amuſements of the gay, or the toils of the induſtrious, would not unwillingly be ſuſpended at the call of devotion, did ſhe condeſcend to addreſs them with her native cheerful countenance, and ſuffer them to reſume their various employments with renewed alacrity. We ſhould then, no doubt, be more familiar with the edifying ſpectacle of a private manſion changed into a temple of God; the father of a family into the ſacred character of their prieſt; brethren and ſiſters, kinsfolk and friends, into fellow-worſhippers around the ſame domeſtic altar, over which the genius of true religion preſides; while the career of worldly pleaſures and purſuits is, for a few moments, exchanged for more important cares, by which the lively ſpirits of the young are gently reſtrained, and the diſquietudes and anxieties of age are ſoothed into peace.

What happy effects this naturally tends to produce it is not difficult to conceive.

—When

—When the ſeveral members of your houſehold obſerve you affectionately intereſted in their preſent and eternal welfare, and hear the prayers which you preſent, on their behalf, to the Father of all the families of the earth, the moſt thoughtleſs cannot avoid being unawares betrayed into attention, having their affections ſeized, and liſtening with reverence mingled with gratitude. What follows, but that hence they muſt neceſſarily receive ſuch a tincture of piety, as, though it may be obſcured for a ſeaſon, can never be wholly loſt?

Nor can any thing tend more to ſtrengthen the union of a family, and engage the affections of its ſeveral members to each other. Becauſe, in the firſt place, nothing contributes more to the regular diſcharge of thoſe mutual obligations which are the beſt foundation of their union. And then by calling them to partake of the pleaſures of devotion, heightened

heightened by all the powers of ſympathy, it muſt raiſe a mutual friendſhip on the baſis of eſteem, far ſuperior to the unhallowed combinations of the vicious, both in ſtability and ardour.

You complain of the undutifulneſs of children, the unfaithfulneſs of ſervants, the ill offices of neighbours, and a thouſand diſorders and diſquietudes which imbitter life. Why then do you not in earneſt endeavour to remove the ſource of theſe infelicities? Do you aſk what ſource?—The want of religion. If you could bring yourſelves and all around you under the influence of that principle, you would then be completely happy both from within and from without. And how can you hope for ſo great a happineſs, but from the bleſſing of heaven upon your counſels, your endeavours, your example?

Thus

Thus introduced into domeſtic life, religion too herſelf grows more lovely; wears not that melancholy aſpect which ſo often keeps youth and gaiety at a diſtance; but eaſily mingles with all the friendly affections, and aſſumes that venerable and intereſting form, which above all things endears her to the heart.

Methinks, to ſee the ſpirit of devotion enter all mild and humble, cheerful and compoſed, where the ſocial virtues reign, where induſtry joins hand in hand with contentment, and friendſhip, with her train of cares and pleaſures, delights to dwell; is, of all the beautiful ſcenes of human life, one of the moſt beautiful. Behold a happy family, encircling the faithful guardian of their infancy, their childhood, and their youth! What lively gratitude is painted upon every countenance, while they liſten to the words of

eternal

eternal life, or raiſe the ſocial hymn to that good Being who has crowned their days with loving-kindneſs, and made their cup overflow with bleſſings! Sweet are the accents of artleſs innocence; cheerful the praiſes of dawning reaſon and opening virtue; but to the parent's ear they are indeed ſounds of delight! O then, with what fervour does the prayer of his heart riſe to the God of his fore-fathers and of his children, that himſelf and his houſehold may be kept in the paths of wiſdom and holineſs, guided by the hand of Providence through the mazes of the preſent world, and at length meet together in ſome happier and better ſtate!

Pious Chriſtian, thy prayers are heard: thy children ſhall be virtuous: thy dependants ſhall be faithful: thy friends ſhall be ſincere: the choiceſt dews of heaven ſhall ſhed their influence upon thy labours: "Thy prayers and thine

"alms

" alms are come up as a memorial before " God!"

Let me now aſk the profane libertine, who revels in the midſt of unbounded indulgence, unawed by the authority of God or man; can you contemplate the character of the good man, who feareth God with all his houſe, without feeling that he is happy, and that you are miſerable? O Vice, what a monſter art thou in the preſence of Virtue!

And here I cannot diſpenſe with myſelf from calling upon thoſe, who, by their rank in life, their ſhining abilities, or their poliſhed manners, can with more than common power allure mankind to imitation;—who can give enchanting grace to folly, and make vice itſelf look leſs unpleaſing;—to inſtruct as well as charm by their example, and to exert that influence in favour of the declining

declining cauſe of domeſtic piety, which will render them in the higheſt degree the friends of mankind, and the favourites of heaven.

But if the moſt ſanguine wiſhes of the wiſe and good are to be fruitleſs, and the collected force of worldly diſtinctions muſt for ever be in oppoſition to the ſpirit of religion; let thoſe, whom obſcurity will protect from cenſure, if it precludes extenſive uſefulneſs, remember that God looks down with equal complacency upon the devout worſhipper in the lowlieſt cottage, as upon the kneeling monarch in his palace; and that it will be far happier, both for themſelves and their offspring, to be encompaſſed with the divine favour than adorned with wealth and honours.

If they have no earthly inheritance to bequeath, let them ſtrive to enrich their families with the treaſures of immortality;

and, raiſing themſelves above this world, let them nobly addreſs the men who are devoted to it in the words of Joſhua, "Chooſe ye for yourſelves whom ye "will ſerve; but, as for me and my "houſe, we will ſerve the Lord[a]."

O, ye parents, it is a delightful but an arduous taſk which Providence hath aſſigned you; and if properly affected by its importance, eſpecially while the preſence of thoſe who are deareſt to your hearts calls forth the tendereſt wiſhes, mixed with parental ſolicitude; can you help looking up to the Eternal Providence? Does not the voice of prayer already tremble upon your lips?—Then let an impulſe ſo ſacred be indulged! Quench not the flame of gratitude which riſes ſpontaneouſly to heaven; check not the tear of penitence which flows uncalled! Amidſt the profuſion of domeſtic bleſſings which the Univerſal Parent has poured around

[a] Joſhua xxiv. 15.

you,

you, think of his goodneſs, and your own unworthineſs. Share with thoſe you love ſome of the pureſt joys we taſte on earth, and faithfully diſcharge towards them the kindeſt offices which affection can ſuggeſt. Let the Father of all the families of the earth be duly honoured in yours. And rejoice in the pleaſing proſpect, that thoſe principles of piety, which you are at preſent planting, ſhall flouriſh, and bleſs the world in future generations; and that your memory ſhall be bleſſed after you have been gathered unto your fathers, and numbered with the friends of virtue, religion, and mankind, who have been the ornament of former ages.

But while your domeſtic piety is enlivened by zeal, let it alſo be tempered with diſcretion. Let it be accompanied with the whole circle of ſocial virtues, and adorned with all the charms which

eaſe and cheerfulneſs can beſtow. Beware of the fatal ſuperſtition of tedious forms, vain repetitions, and long prayers. Imitate the example of Cornelius, who accompanied his devotion to God with benevolence to men. And while you labour, by your counſels and your prayers, to perſuade your houſehold to walk in the paths of holineſs, let them behold you walking before them.

Be aſſured the faithful diſcharge of theſe important duties will hereafter be followed by no unpleaſing reflections. Your pious cares will be amply repaid by the peace and order, the virtue and happineſs, which ſhall bleſs your dwelling. You will ſee your offspring around you approved of God, and beloved of men. While you are permitted to remain with them you will be happy in their virtues and their gratitude. Whenever you are called to leave them you will have reaſon

to

to commit them thankfully into the hands of Providence. The tears which they give to your memory will endear religion to their hearts. Your name will call forth the ſenſibilities of virtue as well as of nature; and every tender recollection will be accompanied with the hope of meeting in a happier world to part no more.

SERMON III.

ON BENEVOLENCE.

Matthew xxii. 39. ——— *Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf.*

IF we were to ſit down and deviſe a plan for the happineſs of mankind, it is evident that, though we could command the utmoſt profuſion of all the external objects of enjoyment, adapted to the taſte and inclination of every individual, this would not be ſufficient, unleſs, by ſome powerful principle, we could alſo bind the ſeveral individuals together in ſocial harmony, and engage them mutually to co-operate for the general good.

It is equally evident that thoſe principles in each individual which terminate in private gratification, and thoſe which lead to the good of ſociety at large, ought, in order that both may completely anſwer their reſpective purpoſe, to be exactly of the ſame degree of ſtrength.

Now they may be ſaid to be equally ſtrong, when, upon equal intereſts of two perſons interfering, it is a matter of indifference to both, which of them ſhall ſacrifice his own intereſt to the intereſt of the other. If, on one hand, the ſelfiſh principles were the ſtronger, a man would purſue an inferior intereſt of his own at the expenſe of a greater of his fellow-creatures. If, on the other hand, the benevolent were the ſtronger, in order to procure a leſs good for his fellow-creatures, he would give up a greater of his own. In either caſe it is plain that a leſs good would be preferred to a greater; conſequently,

conſequently, that in both caſes the general happineſs of the community would be diminiſhed.

But, ſuppoſing the ſelfiſh and the benevolent principles to be exactly balanced, there the greateſt good, by whomſoever enjoyed, becomes the ſole and univerſal object of attention; and, by the combined efforts of every individual, all poſſible happineſs will be accumulated. What conſtitution can more perfectly accord with infinite goodneſs!

Hence the Chriſtian religion, not content with recommending the cultivation and exerciſe of benevolent affections in general, has alſo delineated, with perfect accuracy, the extent to which they ſhould be cultivated, and the degree in which they ſhould be exerciſed. An evidence, not to be deſpiſed, of its divine original! For God, who hath eſtabliſhed the moſt accurate proportions throughout

the material world, and created every part of the viſible univerſe in "number, "weight, and meaſure," has no doubt formed the ſame juſt proportions among the powers of the human mind, and eſtabliſhed a correſpondent balance of the affections. But the moſt beneficial proportion which can be conceived between ſelf-love and benevolence being, as we have already ſeen, that of perfect equality, we muſt neceſſarily conclude that the Univerſal Parent hath formed every individual not more for himſelf than for others; and that he hath endued us with generous affections, not merely capable of controling ſelfiſhneſs in the extreme, but of raiſing us to that ſublimity of goodneſs which Chriſtianity enjoins, and hereby fitting us for that perfection of happineſs which it reveals.

Not that the benevolent affections are born with us in full maturity, or that they can attain at once to ſuch a pitch

pitch of excellence; but, when cultivated and improved, and carried to perfection, they are capable of becoming the ſtrongeſt, and the moſt delightful, of all the affections.

That principle which actuates the benevolent heart is not a ſimple emotion, but a concurrence of ſeveral, concentering and reciprocally heightening each other.

The foundation of it is that ſympathy by means of which we derive many of our pleaſures and pains by reflection from thoſe around us. And though theſe reflected pleaſures and pains are ſeldom ſo intenſe as thoſe which ariſe from immediate ſenſation, yet they muſt neceſſarily operate as powerful incitements to acts of kindneſs and compaſſion.

But our ſympathy is comparatively weak and languid till it is enlivened by eſteem—eſteem ariſing from the ſenſe of excellence. Hence we are more ſtrongly impreſſed

impreſſed with the diſtreſs of a man than of a brute; we ſympathize more tenderly with the innocent than with the guilty, and with the virtuous than with the merely innocent: but we are rouſed to indignation by the calamities of thoſe who ſuffer for their integrity, and whoſe conduct ſhould have armed all the world in their defence.

But, though ſympathy united with eſteem may riſe high, yet both will be greatly heightened by perſonal gratitude. Generous minds indeed prize the kind intention of their benefactor beyond the largeſt benefits. When, however, thoſe amiable qualities which we admire at a diſtance are not only brought near, but eſſentially contribute to our own happineſs, we cannot but feel their native excellence with the keeneſt ſenſibility. It is then that, conſcious of their irreſiſtible attraction, the heart beats reſponſive to the welfare or diſtreſs of their poſſeſſor,

and

and waits with impatient ſolicitude to reward his kindneſs.

But it is neither ſympathy, nor eſteem, nor perſonal gratitude, which gives the higheſt tone to the benevolent affections. It is not the ſpectator of human happineſs who merely looks on with pleaſure, but the generous ſervant of the public, who can regard that happineſs as the fruit of his own virtue—this is the man who feels in their full energy all the emotions of benevolence. He conſiders himſelf as the author of general happineſs; the object therefore of general gratitude. A kind of parental tenderneſs comes over his mind; his dependants are his children; and, when he beholds them flouriſh by his care, he is conſcious of that glow of virtuous ſatisfaction, which, infinitely exalted, conſtitutes the felicity of the Father of the univerſe.

Such

Such are the principal affections which, riſing gradually and in ſucceſſion, but at length acting together in full concert, render the principle of benevolence complete. A principle conſiſting of ſo many noble affections, brought into vigorous action, and conſpiring with one accord, may well be ſuppoſed to form one of the moſt powerful movements of the human ſoul.

Hence it is, however, natural to allege, that, whatever ſtrength the principle of benevolence may acquire in its progreſs to maturity, it is at firſt but a tender plant, which requires the moſt aſſiduous cultivation; that it is liable to be checked in its growth by ſelfiſhneſs, and blaſted by reſentment, on our own part; and on that of others is in danger of being deſtroyed by unkindneſs, and can never flouriſh without the genial returns of gratitude. Beſides, it is plain that, in order to love others as well as ourſelves, we muſt at leaſt entertain as much eſteem for them

as

as for ourſelves; and be convinced that they have hearts not only ſuſceptible of generous ſentiments, but capable of feeling them in a degree equal to our own. It follows that the warmth of all the ſocial affections muſt depend not merely upon our own conduct, but upon that of our neighbour; nor can any individual riſe to the perfection of goodneſs, till he is encouraged by the general reformation of mankind. Since, therefore, in the preſent ſtate, the pureſt benevolence is liable to unavoidable abatements and interruptions, we might infer that the directions of ſcripture are the ſtandard of perfection, not of human infirmity; and, conſequently, that we are not ſtrictly required to love our neighbour with the ſame ardour as we love ourſelves; but to propoſe that degree of benevolence as the mark of our utmoſt ambition.

And yet, allowing that to entertain a good opinion of mankind, to be conſcious of

of deſerving well of our fellow-creatures, and that even to call forth their gratitude, and provoke them to equal generoſity, are requiſites which the heart demands in order to give full ſcope to its generous affections—how can theſe requiſites be wanting to the man who forms his life upon the plan of diſintereſted goodneſs, and fills up his ſphere of activity with all poſſible inſtances of beneficence? Bad as the world is, benevolence will ever be the favourite of mankind. The generous benefactor, the diſintereſted friend of his race, cannot fail of at once attracting their good-will to himſelf, and alluring their attention to the excellence of virtue. Eſteem and gratitude are his inſeparable attendants. All hearts beat with the moſt friendly diſpoſitions towards him. And therefore, by the conſtitution of nature, theſe are encouragements, which, like the univerſal influences of the ſun, the rain, and the dew, are beſtowed profuſely,

fuſely, for the moſt part, upon the truly benevolent man.

But, whatever be the treatment which he receives, his benevolence does not entirely depend upon the conduct of others. It may be raiſed, it may be animated, by the rays of reciprocal affection; it may be damped and leſſened by unkindneſs; but it can never be extinguiſhed. For what though it be poſſible that ſome may prove ungrateful; do they not counteract their own nature? Is not man formed for gratitude? and is not Diſintereſted Goodneſs its proper object? Does not the heart ſtill exult in the very conſciouſneſs of ſo divine a principle? Can there be a more endearing tie than to know that we have the power to make a fellow-creature happy? And what ſentiment can dwell with ſuch inexpreſſible ſweetneſs upon the ſoul, as that of being the inſtruments of conveying Heaven's bounty to mankind?

Even towards an enemy—the moment we have reſolved to relieve his diſtreſs, to conſult his intereſt, to treat him generouſly—our whole frame is immediately ſoftened with ſocial ſympathy. Conſcious of deſerved eſteem, and full of the moſt benevolent intentions, we view him with quite other eyes: we anticipate the conciliating force of unconquerable goodneſs. His whole aſpect is already changed—humanity reſumes her empire—every emotion of revenge expires in contrition—and the enemy is loſt in the friend.

But when we behold the dawn of reciprocal affection, and diſcover the marks of riſing gratitude—when we are conſcious of befriending the virtuous, the affectionate—then riſes the godlike flame triumphant in its full perfection. Every pleaſing image, every generous ſentiment, every ſocial paſſion, ſprings up within us. The heart warms, expands,

and

and overflows. O ye divine affections! with what ſublime enthuſiaſm do ye fill the ſoul—raiſe it above the world, and above itſelf—and inſpire it with the joys of angels!

If then, amidſt the preſent diſorders of human ſociety, there is ſtill ſo much ſcope for the exertions of a benevolent mind, what would there be, ſhould mankind begin to act, univerſally, upon the ſame diſintereſted plan! Were all men to do unto others as they would "that "others ſhould do unto them"—was each in particular as ſolicitous to perform as to demand his due—did no individual ever diſcover a wiſh to ſhare in the benefits of ſociety, without contributing his full part to the common advantage—in ſhort, were all the obligations of ſocial life invariably fulfilled, what a glorious ſcene would ariſe! Then there would be no hatred, but hatred of vice; no contempt, but contempt of baſeneſs; no emulation,

but the emulation of friendſhip; no contention, but that of gratitude.—All ranks would be linked together in bands of inviolable union. The rich would regard the poor, and the poor the rich, as their own kindred blood. The old and the young would mutually exchange the warmth of parental tenderneſs and filial veneration. On the part of ſuperiors would reign mild condeſcenſion; confidence and zealous ſervice on that of inferiors; and between equals perfect ſympathy. We ſhould be all a confederacy of common friends—one numerous and happy family, one great body animated by one ſoul, and acting, in all its different members, with uninterrupted harmony for the general good.

That the human heart, when properly cultivated, is capable of riſing to this glorious perfection, we have already ſeen: and can it be conceived that ſuch exalted capacities are deſigned for ever to lie dormant?

mant? or that the God of love would have created them at all, without providing, in the iſſue, for their unbounded indulgence?

In the preſent ſtate our benevolent affections are greatly contracted in their extent by the limitation of our views and powers; as well as abated in their degree by the degeneracy of mankind—are expoſed to many diſappointments from the ingratitude of others, many interruptions from our own frailty—and often become ſources of pain, amidſt the unavoidable calamities of life. But if we are ever brought into a world of ſpotleſs purity, where the whole circle of virtues are aſſembled, where eternal goodneſs reigns in the midſt of a rejoicing univerſe, where the active ſoul may range without limits, and through all eternity, graſping ſtill wider and wider proſpects of the benignity of the Creator—if we are ever admitted into this bright region, what

glories will break in upon us! and what a vaſt accumulation of happineſs will accrue from the exerciſe of the benevolent affections!

To prepare for a reward like this, ſo far ſurpaſſing our ſublimeſt conceptions, can we regard any labours as too great, or any diſcipline as too ſevere?

With how much caution then ſhould we guard againſt the exceſſes of ſelf-love! With how much vigilance ſhould we ſuppreſs the firſt emotions of reſentment! With what concern ſhould we lament the frailties and diſtreſſes,—with what delight congratulate the proſperity and the virtues of our fellow-creatures! How mild and condeſcending ought we to be—how candid, liberal, grateful, and affectionate! How ſolicitous to avoid giving pain to any, and to promote the good of all!

Theſe are the true pleaſures, the great virtues of our nature. Theſe, through the whole courſe of our exiſtence, conſtitute our duty and our happineſs. "Whe-" ther there be prophecies, they ſhall " fail; whether there be tongues, they " ſhall ceaſe; whether there be know-" ledge, it ſhall vaniſh away:" but charity ſhall remain for ever—the univerſal ſpirit which animates the regions of the bleſſed—the eternal ſource of order and happineſs throughout the boundleſs empire of God.

SERMON IV.

THE HISTORY OF JEPHTHAH's VOW ILLUSTRATED AND IMPROVED.

Judges xi. 39, 40. *And it was a cuſtom in Iſrael, that the daughters of Iſrael went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.*

THIS was a public tribute of reſpect paid to her memory for having yielded herſelf up a willing ſacrifice, in conſequence of a ſolemn vow made by her father. It was a memorable, perhaps unparalleled, example of filial piety and generous patriotiſm; and at the ſame time diſcovered ſuch greatneſs of mind and high

high reverence for the Supreme Being, as deſerve to be celebrated throughout all generations.

It has indeed been thought by ſeveral learned men that the vow of Jephthah did not affect his daughter's life, but doomed her to perpetual celibacy. And doubtleſs there is ſomething ſo ſhocking and unnatural in the idea of a father, one who profeſſed to worſhip the true God, ſhedding the blood of a beloved and only daughter upon the altar of miſtaken piety, that it is no wonder that every evaſion has been attempted in order to give another turn to the ſtory.

But, whatever was the fact in this inſtance, it cannot poſſibly throw any odium upon the law of Moſes, as authorizing or countenancing ſuch horrid enormities under the colour of religion: for nothing can be more ſtrictly forbidden, or repreſented as more abominable in the

ſight of God, than human ſacrifices are in the Old Teſtament [a].

So prone, however, was the Jewiſh nation to rebel, that, notwithſtanding the moſt ſolemn prohibitions and denunciations, it is plain, from many paſſages in the prophets and in the pſalms, that the land of Judea, even after the expulſion of the ancient idolatrous inhabitants, was deeply ſtained with the blood of human victims [b],

On the other hand, it muſt be owned that there is not a ſingle inſtance upon record of any of the Iſraelites devoting themſelves or their children to the rigours of a monaſtic life. Nor does it appear that

[a] Lev. xviii. 21. xx. 2. Deut. xii. 30, 31. Iſa. lxvi. 3, &c.

[b] Pſal. cvi. 37, 38. Jer. vii. 31. Ezek. xvi. 20, 21, &c.

it

it had ever entered into their minds that conſecrations of this kind poſſeſſed any ſanctity, or could have any tendency to render the Deity propitious. On the contrary, in this nation, as in no other, to die without iſſue was accounted not only calamitous but reproachful, and a mark of the diſpleaſure of heaven. Accordingly, in the caſe of Jephthah's daughter, this was bewailed as one of the moſt aggravating circumſtances.

Beſides, if her life had only been thus conſecrated to the Divine ſervice, and not forfeited, ſhe might have been redeemed [c]. And this her diſtreſſed father would moſt aſſuredly have availed himſelf of, had that been all the import of his vow.

On every ſuppoſition therefore he muſt be allowed to have been as much a ſtranger

[c] Lev. xxvii. 4.

to

to the Moſaic inſtitutions as to the perfections of the Divine Being.

There is indeed one ſpecies of vow mentioned, Lev. xxvii. which admitted of no redemption. But as this is to be explained in conſiſtency with the ſixth commandment, and the foregoing prohibitions of human ſacrifices, it is plain that it could only relate to enemies in war, or to perſons convicted of ſome capital crime, of one or other of which are all the examples of it which are found upon record. This could not poſſibly be applied to the caſe of Jephthah's daughter; and yet it is not difficult to conceive, that, being miſunderſtood by her father, it might contribute to his fatal deluſion, deeply tinctured as his mind probably was with the ſuperſtition of human ſacrifices, then prevailing in all the neighbouring nations.

That

That the times in which Jephthah lived were extremely ignorant and corrupt, we learn from the chapter preceding his hiſtory, which informs us that the immediate cauſe of the war which gave occaſion to his vow was, "that the children of Iſrael had done evil in the "ſight of the Lord, and ſerved Baalim, "and Aſhtaroth, and the gods of Syria, "and the gods of Zidon, and the gods "of Moab, and the gods of the children "of Ammon, and the gods of the Phi-"liſtines; and forſook the Lord, and "ſerved not him: and the anger of the "Lord was hot againſt Iſrael, and he "ſold them into the hands of the Phi-"liſtines, and into the hands of the chil-"dren of Ammon [d]."

It is alſo to be conſidered, that Jephthah had been for ſome time baniſhed from his own land, and obliged to aſſociate

[d] Judges x. 6, 7.

with

with men of ruined fortunes, who ſubſiſted upon plunder, and lived in the midſt of arms [e]. Under ſuch circumſtances it is not likely that his mind ſhould grow more enlightened, but rather that he ſhould add all the errors and corruptions of the country in which he lived to thoſe which he had brought from his own.

Laſtly, conſider the tenor of the vow itſelf, and that it is expreſsly ſubjoined, "that he did unto his daughter accord-"ing to his vow." Though there be ſome degree of obſcurity in the original, yet the words ſtrongly intimate that ſhe was ſacrificed [f]. And it is certain that from the moſt ancient times this was the prevailing opinion, not only of Chriſtian writers, but of the Jews themſelves; and ſome have thought that there are traces of this ſtory, intermixed with fabulous

[e] Judges xi. 3. [f] Judges xi. 39. Heb.

circumſtances,

circumſtances, to be found even among the heathens.

But the ſtrongeſt light which antiquity can throw upon it we derive from the Chaldee Paraphraſt and from Joſephus [g], who both agree that Jephthah ſacrificed his daughter as a burnt-offering, and paſs ſevere cenſures upon him on that account.

The foregoing obſervations may perhaps ſuffice to ſhew how the fact ſtood, and that the fault was not in the Moſaic inſtitutions, but in the darkneſs and barbariſm of the times, and of the man himſelf. This being premiſed, the conduct of this unhappy father, and the fate of his illuſtrious daughter, will afford us an inſtructive leſſon.

[g] Antiq. lib. ix. c. 5.

First

Firſt then, Behold in the father the dreadful effects of ignorance in religion! As nothing is more friendly to man, when rightly underſtood, ſo, when perverted, nothing is more pregnant with evil: and though Jephthah had early experienced the hand of adverſity, yet it was his own ſuperſtition which gave the fatal blow to his peace. Deprived of his country and of his inheritance by the injuſtice of his brethren, and a ſtranger in a foreign land, he was ſtill bleſſed in the poſſeſſion of parental joys: and this was not improbably the happieſt period of his life. He had indeed but one daughter. The hiſtorian tells us ſhe was his only child: "beſide her he had neither ſon nor "daughter[h]." But ſhe was pious, dutiful, amiable, and good; and in her centered all the affection of his heart. With the fate of her mother we are not acquainted: but, from the ſilence of the

[h] Judges xi. 34.

hiſtorian about her in the affecting ſcene which follows, it is not unreaſonable to preſume that ſhe was now no more. His daughter, therefore, was the only ſtay which her father's age had to lean upon: for he had left behind in his own country every other object of early and warm attachment; and the reſt of his kindred had proved themſelves unworthy of his regard. But, in giving him this one daughter, Providence had given him every thing, and ſhe deſerved as well as engroſſed all his tenderneſs. Not more were her ſmiles his delight than her virtues were his pride. Never was there a more illuſtrious example of female excellence—never was there a parent happier in a child.

If the daughter's extraordinary virtues are not ſufficient vouchers for the father's merit, there are not wanting many circumſtances in this ſhort ſtory from which Jephthah appears to have ſtood high, and

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not undeſervedly, in the eſtimation of his contemporaries. For though he had been forced away by the avarice of his kinſmen in the days of their proſperity; yet, when they found themſelves attacked by the children of Ammon, they ſolicited his return with ſubmiſſion and reſpect; and promiſed, in that caſe, to obey him as their ſovereign. After ſome expoſtulation for their former conduct, he accepts their commiſſion; enters upon the ſupreme dignity; and, in the preſence of Jehovah, ratifies the convention between himſelf and the people. Thus inveſted with his high office he proceeds to the execution of it with zeal, fidelity, and moderation.

Previous to the commencement of hoſtilities, he ſends two embaſſies ſucceſſively to the king of the Ammonites; carrying on, however, during theſe negociations of peace, every neceſſary preparation for war. His cauſe was a good

one, and he ſtates it clearly.—The people of Iſrael were unjuſtly attacked by the children of Ammon—the land in queſtion the Iſraelites had acquired by right of conqueſt in a juſt and neceſſary war, and had been in undiſturbed poſſeſſion of it above three hundred years.—But, when he could not prevail by the juſtice of his cauſe, and the force of reaſon, the ſword was drawn. Upon which, he ſhewed himſelf as great in action, as before in council: for he bravely advanced to meet the Ammonites, diſcomfited them in a general engagement, took twenty cities, and, after vaſt ſlaughter, reduced them to entire ſubjection.

At this inſtant nothing ſeemed wanting to crown his utmoſt wiſhes. All eyes were doubtleſs fixed upon him as the happieſt of mankind. He found himſelf in the firſt rank of human greatneſs, as the reward of his own merit; and was the more capable of enjoying it, as he had

had formerly experienced the reverſe. But the vow, the fatal vow—to ſacrifice whatſoever came out to meet him, if he returned victorious—not only obſcured the luſtre of his conqueſt, but ſpread darkneſs and deſpair over the remainder of his days.

From firſt to laſt, the fault lay in the miſtaken apprehenſions which Jephthah entertained of himſelf, and of his Maker. With reſpect to himſelf it was certainly a moſt egregious error to imagine that, if Providence would only gratify this one deſire, and give him victory over the Ammonites, there was nothing elſe wanting to complete his happineſs. Yet his heart was ſo entirely engaged, or rather intoxicated, by projects of ambition, and his new greatneſs and honours operated ſo powerfully upon him, that he prays to heaven, unconditionally, for ſucceſs; without reflecting that it was only for the wiſdom of Providence to determine whether that

ſucceſs would terminate in his real advantage. But, more inured to action than reflection, it did not enter into his mind that any one had ever been bleſſed by a defeat, or that conqueſt could poſſibly be ſtained with tears.—No, let this grand object ſucceed to my wiſhes, and there is nothing which I am not content to ſacrifice in exchange.—But, alas! he found too ſoon that the ſhouts of armies and the ſplendors of royalty form a poor ſubſtitute for the emotions of parental tenderneſs and the calm joys of retirement.

This raſh vow, therefore, betrayed great ignorance of what conſtitutes the true happineſs of man, in the firſt conception of it; but in the performance, ſtill greater ignorance of the perfections and laws of the Supreme Being. "I have "vowed unto the Lord," ſays he, "and I "cannot go back." A noble reſolution, had the object of his vow been acceptable

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in the ſight of the Almighty! "Lord, "who ſhall abide in thy tabernacle? who "ſhall dwell in thy holy hill? The "man that ſweareth to his own hurt, "and changeth not." But when the fulfilling of his vow involved in it every ſpecies of guilt which could provoke the indignation of that Being whom it was intended to gratify, what could be more abſurd? — No, he would have reaſoned, God wills the happineſs of his creatures, not their miſery and deſtruction; the ſacrifices which he requires are mercy and judgment — to become a parent to the orphan, inſtead of ceaſing to be one to my own offſpring; and, ſurely, the gratitude and penitence of the father's life will be far more pleaſing in his ſight than the daughter's blood.—Thus he would have reaſoned, and thus have acted, had he not been deſtitute of the true knowledge of God; and for want of this knowledge, he was involved in ſuch a ſcene of

miſery and horror as no words can paint, and it is ſcarcely in the power of the imagination to conceive.

But to ſum up in brief what we may learn from the fate of this great man, whom, with all his errors, we cannot but regard with a dreadful admiration—we have ſeen pictured in ſtrong colours the dire nature and effects of ſuperſtition; into what a monſter the venerable form of religion may be changed; and that no ſtrictneſs in following the dictates of conſcience will preſerve us unblameable, if we do not take care that our conſcience be duly enlightened.

Hence we may infer that no pains can be too great to acquire the knowledge of our own nature, and of our Maker's perfections and laws; ſince the former will lead us to place our happineſs more in the inward temper of a pious and good mind, than in any circumſtances of external grandeur;

grandeur; and the latter, while it inclines us to ſeek above all things the favour of the Almighty, will teach us to ſeek it by acts of benevolence, not of rigour; by co-operating with his Providence; and by offering up to him the genuine praiſe of a cheerful ſpirit, together with the kindeſt overflowings of the heart towards all his offſpring. Nor ſhould we forget, that it were ſhameful indeed for the votaries of true religion to be leſs zealous than the votaries of ſuperſtition—the worſhippers of the Father of men and angels in works of mercy and compaſſion, than the worſhippers of idols and demons in works of cruelty and darkneſs—or for that piety which coincides with reaſon, nature, and all the good affections of the heart, to fall ſhort in fervour of that which is a contradiction to them all.

Theſe leſſons we may learn, and perhaps many more.—But I haſten from the melancholy

melancholy effects of Jephthah's ignorance and ſuperſtition to a ſcene of unmingled admiration, which is preſented to our view in the virtues of his daughter. She, poor innocent victim, ignorant of her father's vow, no ſooner hears the account of his returning with victory, than—together with the common joy which overſpread the country for ſo great a deliverance—ſhe gives herſelf up to the tranſports of filial affection.

The cloud which had ſo long darkened her own, and her father's life, was now breaking, and her ſun began to ſhine with full ſplendor. By this important victory her father was raiſed from his obſcurity to be the head of his country. She herſelf was become a princeſs. In ſuch a ſituation, how natural was it for a young and unexperienced mind to indulge gay and ſplendid viſions of ideal happineſs! to look forward, with all the eagerneſs of new-born hope, to a ſucceſſion of hitherto untaſted pleaſures!

Yet

Yet it does not appear, that theſe were the principal images which occupied her mind.—No—it was her father, and her country, and her country's God.—For them ſhe triumphed; and in their glory ſhe ſeems to have forgot herſelf.

Animated, however, by the thought of her country's deliverance, and that her father was its deliverer, ſhe prepares a feſtive ſcene to welcome his return—aſſembles her companions—with unaſſuming modeſty mingles in the train—anticipates the gladneſs of his heart at her approach—and, accompanied with timbrels and dances, and ſuch marks of triumph as accord with the ſimplicity of the age, goes forth—a daughter and a princeſs—to meet a father and a conqueror.

"And it came to paſs, when he ſaw "her, that he rent his clothes."

What

What a ſhock of conflicting paſſions! the daughter ruſhing unconſcious into the father's arms—every ſource of tenderneſs opened, but ſuppreſſed as ſoon as felt, on his part—yet ſtill recalled with heightened force by the marks of tender apprehenſion and alarm ſucceeding to triumphant joy, on hers.—

A ſcene this which no human being could have beheld unmoved!

But her father—what muſt he feel! Few are the words he utters; "Alas, my "daughter! thou haſt brought me very "low! and thou art one of them that "trouble me; for I have opened my "mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go "back." But his rent garments, his diſtracted aſpect, and his ſilence, ſpoke the reſt.

Unhappy Jephthah! thou waſt returning home, amidſt the tumultuous joys of military glory, to bind around a daughter's

ter's brow the diadem which thy valour had won—and, oh, with what grace would her virtues have adorned it! But ſhe for whom thou haſt fought, for whom thou haſt conquered, dies—the victim of thy raſh ſuperſtition, and of her own filial piety. Thy grey hairs ſhall deſcend to the grave deſolate; and no memorial, but thy unheard-of griefs, remain behind thee.

Should compaſſion prompt any one to inquire how long Jephthah lived to lament his error, we are informed in the chapter which follows the hiſtory of his vow that after a turbulent reign of ſix years he died, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

The wonder is, that he ſurvived ſo long. To ſee a beloved and only daughter, the pride and ſolace of his life, the object to which all his affections clung, towards whom every purſuit tended, and in whoſe welfare

welfare every hope and wiſh centered—who at the ſame time merited all his tenderneſs, and returned it with more endearing ſoftneſs—to ſee her trembling at his feet—conjuring him to ſpare the life he gave—to remember her innocence, her helpleſſneſs, her tender years—could any thing melt the heart of a parent like this!

Yes—the behaviour of Jephthah's daughter was far more noble and affecting. "My father, if thou haſt opened thy "mouth unto the Lord, do to me ac- "cording to that which hath proceeded "out of thy mouth; for as much as the "Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of "thine enemies, even of the children of "Ammon."

There ſpoke the ſoul of a daughter—a patriot—a martyr—and a Chriſtian.—Yes, Chriſtian—for which of us all, though trained up to the immortal hopes

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of the Goſpel, could have replied more nobly?

But what completes the character is, that it was no ſtoical pride, no coldneſs of temper, no inſenſibility to the pleaſures of life; it was the very ſpirit of generoſity and piety itſelf which inſpired her; and that at a time when her heart was elated with feſtivity and triumph. No—it was no eaſy taſk to reſign, in early life, the honours and pleaſures juſt beginning to bloom around her; to quit her companions and friends; to give up every tender attachment which a mind virtuous and amiable as hers had formed; to leave her father mourning his victory, with no ſmiling offspring to conſole him for her loſs—it was a painful trial, and ſhe felt it all—ſhe loved her father, and ſhe loved her friends—the gifts of fortune were ſhowered around her, and ſhe had a ſoul to enjoy them.

With

With ſuch reflections penetrated, but not ſubdued, ſhe entreats of her father two months—no more—to bewail her deſtiny, to take leave of her companions, to fortify and prepare her mind. Then, inſtead of attempting by perſuaſion, or by flight, or by the interpoſition of neighbouring ſtates, or by any other means, to ſecure her ſafety in this ſhort interval, as ſoon as the period had elapſed ſhe returns to her afflicted parent with the ſame meek and dutiful ſubmiſſion as ſhe had ſhewn in happier days.

It was not therefore the tranſient burſt of great and ſublime emotion—but the reſult of deliberate reſolution, deep-rooted principles, and habits of exalted virtue—piety to God, affection for her country, tenderneſs to her father, love of honourable death, and ſuperiority to all the allurements of life.

The practical improvement of this affecting ſtory, and the great example

which it exhibits, are ſufficiently obvious, and might be left to every one's own reflections. I ſhall therefore only make two obſervations upon the whole.

In the firſt place, from ſuch heroic actions as we have been contemplating, it is impoſſible not to be ſtruck with the dignity of that nature which God hath given us. There is ſomething in every human breaſt which beats reſponſive, and forms a ſympathetic harmony. Does not this clearly mark our high deſtination? that we were made to perform as well as to admire all that is truly great—to triumph over pleaſure, over pain—to meet death with firmneſs—to forget ourſelves in the diſintereſted purſuit of others' good—to emulate ſuperior natures—to aim at godlike perfection? Why elſe did the Great Father of our ſpirits enkindle within us that ſpark of celeſtial fire, which, at the breath of virtue and of glory, breaks out and burns with inextinguiſhable

ardour? For lives there a man of ſentiments ſo depraved, of morals ſo abandoned, that I may not appeal to? Who that had been preſent at the laſt ſcene of Jephthah's daughter—beheld the victim meekly ſurrendering her innocent life—heard the laſt cheerful adieu to her companions—not one complaining word upon her lips, but vainly endeavouring to conſole her father — then ſeen her advancing to the altar—ſeen the pure blood flow—who but muſt have confeſſed, in the full conviction of his heart, that there is nothing ſo great, ſo amiable, as virtue—that this is, beyond compariſon, the end for which man was made?

And may I not add, in the ſecond place, that theſe exalted ſentiments, ſo congenial to the human mind, and which bear upon them ſo plainly the ſtamp of the Divinity, could never be implanted to become our bane; nor need we dread to follow the generous impulſe in the face

face of danger, or even of death. He who formed us, and taught us to love virtue as the ſovereign good, loves virtue himſelf; he can, and therefore will, render it immortal. Could any one who ſtood beholding when the daughter of Jephthah gave up her life to her father and her country, believe it poſſible for a ſoul like hers, this moment the wonder of the univerſe, the next to ſink into a ſtate of everlaſting inſenſibility? No—it is the low and groveling mind, which hears nothing but the agonizing groan; ſees nothing but the ſtreaming blood; and whoſe view terminates in the grave of unrequited virtue, and heaven-forſaken innocence. By the enlightened eye of reaſon as well as faith, out of the ruins of this earthly frame, the immortal ſpirit is beheld aſpiring—brightening to perfection as it approaches the ſeats of bliſs—while choirs of angels are waiting to welcome its arrival!

Great nature whiſpers to man—the virtuous ſoul ſhall never die.—Reaſon cries aloud—it reſts in the boſom of Omnipotence.—" No power," ſays the Saviour of the world, " can pluck it out " of my Father's hand."

Such is the general ſentiment of mankind. That it was the ſentiment of the nation to which Jephthah's daughter belonged, appears from the funeral honours which were paid to her departed ſpirit: for we are told that " it was a cuſtom in " Iſrael, that the daughters of Iſrael went " yearly to lament," or, as it ſhould have been tranſlated, " to celebrate the praiſes " of the daughter of Jephthah;" for ſuch virtue could not be wept with common tears—not with tears of grief, but of rapturous admiration: and this ſolemnity continued " four days every year," which, by the way, amounts to the deciſive teſtimony of a whole nation's voice that virtue like hers, did really exiſt; and likewiſe

wiſe declares, in the moſt unambiguous language, the ſenſe which they entertained, that virtue and immortality are one. For while the daughters of Iſrael were mingling their tears and praiſes around her tomb, could they help repreſenting to themſelves the conſcious ſpirit of the departed as highly gratified by the tribute which their hearts paid to her memory?

But though no token of the reſpect of ſurvivors could reach the retired manſions of the dead, nor even the accents of true affection pierce their iron ſlumbers; ſtill might the daughters of Iſrael, amidſt their ſolemn rites, learn a leſſon moſt momentous to themſelves—that life has no value without virtue, nor death any terrors but thoſe of guilt.

If we can learn the ſame leſſon, and engrave it deeply upon our hearts, we ſhall have no reaſon to repent of having joined

this amiable company of mourners; nor, if at any time our love of virtue and hope of immortality begin to languiſh, can they fail to be in ſome meaſure revived, whenever we reviſit in imagination, the tomb of the daughter of Jephthah.

SERMON

SERMON V.

ON PLEASURE.

2 Timothy iii. 4. *Lovers of pleaſures more than lovers of God.*

THAT this is too much the character of the preſent age ſeems to be generally allowed: that even the beſt of us (conſidering our proneneſs to imitation) are in danger of being carried along with the prevailing current, is a neceſſary conſequence: and that the manners and diſpoſitions to which it leads are highly criminal and unjuſtifiable, we cannot deny. At the ſame time it is extremely undeſirable either to abſtract ourſelves from ſociety,

or to engage in fruitleſs oppoſition to all the world, except ſo far as the indiſpenſable laws of our duty enjoin. There is therefore a certain middle line between rigid abſtinence and unlimited indulgence, which will be found moſt favourable both to the conſcientious diſcharge of duty, and to the pleaſurable enjoyment of life.

Let us then conſider, firſt, how far the purſuit of pleaſure is allowable; and, ſecondly, when it becomes criminal.

Firſt, let me claim your attention as the advocate of pleaſure. When confined within thoſe bounds which nature, reaſon, and virtue, preſcribe, pleaſure is always valuable for its own ſake. In whatever form it ſolicits our notice, accompanied with innocence, gratitude, moderation, induſtry and virtue, cold and inſenſible muſt be that ſtoic breaſt which turns from it with diſdain. Nor were it only to check the impulſe of our own nature,

nature, but alſo to counteract the intention of Providence. For why was it ordained that mere exiſtence ſhould not be our only portion, but that the whole univerſe ſhould contribute to embelliſh that exiſtence with ſo many attractive charms? Was this all in vain? or was it not deſigned to ſpread joy and gladneſs through the breaſt of every living creature? Pleaſure then, confined within the boundaries of reaſon, is, for its own ſake, the object of rational and lawful deſire.

But beſides this, we may obſerve, that the human frame is ſo conſtituted as to require ſome kind of relaxation from the graver ſtudies and ſeverer buſineſs of life. And if it be true, that ſometimes to unbend the mind is neceſſary to prepare it for exertions of ſuperior vigour, then moſt certainly thoſe pleaſures or amuſements which are confined within their proper limits, may be conſidered as very eſſential branches in every plan either of private improvement,

improvement or of public uſefulneſs. They acquire a value and a dignity from the generous and beneficial purſuits with which they are aſſociated, and to which, without the leaſt impropriety, they may be ſaid to contribute. And the man who is known to fill up honourably and uſefully his rank and ſtation in ſociety, whatever they are, may condeſcend, on proper occaſions, to own himſelf pleaſed with trifles, and not render his character the leſs reſpectable; certainly not the leſs amiable.

Nor is this the only circumſtance which marks the intention of Providence, that pleaſures ſhould be mingled with ſerious cares, and that they ſhould become ſubſervient to each other: there is a ſtill higher reaſon for a more liberal indulgence to that age which nature has diſtinguiſhed by the ſtrongeſt propenſity to the purſuit of pleaſures, and in which the

the enjoyment of them is the moſt graceful and becoming.

It is a ſtriking proof of the wiſdom and goodneſs of Providence, that the world commonly puts on its moſt ſmiling aſpect to welcome our entrance. The charm of novelty makes every object which we then behold an object of delight. All around is wonder, enchantment, and ecſtaſy. Every thing we ſee, and every thing we hear, is capable of attracting the attention, and ſoothing the heart. In ſhort, the firſt ſcenes of our exiſtence may be conſidered as the empire of pleaſure, and her favourite reſidence. And for what end was this ordained, but that, at the period when we are leaſt capable of conducting affairs of importance, and moſt free from the avocations of buſineſs and the cares of life, impreſſions of cheerfulneſs and joy might be ſtamped upon the mind—that the ſocial principles, nouriſhed by giving and receiving pleaſure,

might be ſtrengthened and improved—and that ſtores of gratitude and love to our Great Parent might be laid up within the ſoul from ſo long a train of recollected bleſſings? Theſe are virtues, for which the rigid and auſtere are not always the moſt remarkable: yet, what is there left which deſerves the name of virtue, when the cheerful ſervice of our fellow-creatures, and of our Maker, is wanting? Nature therefore clearly points out (as the God of nature ordained) that cheerfulneſs, gaiety, and pleaſure, accompanied with innocence and virtue, ſhould preſide over the early ſtages of life.

Obſerve then, my young friends, obſerve and admire the benignity of your Creator! Let every new-born hope and heart-felt joy that childhood or youth inſpires, open in your breaſts the ſprings of pious gratitude, and increaſe the generous ſpirit of univerſal benevolence.

So

So much in behalf of pleaſure. Let now conſider what is due to religion. And as you have heard ample juſtice done to the former, hear what may be urged for the pretenſions of the latter. You will not, however, imagine for a moment that pleaſure and religion are going to be ſet at variance. True religion and true pleaſure are neither enemies nor rivals, but the ſincereſt friends—inſeparable companions—and firm allies. Wherever true religion is, there true pleaſure will always be found. "The ways of wiſdom are "ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths "are paths of peace."

But from this ſhould any one conceive that religion has no difficulties, that it enjoins no labours or hardſhips, but leaves us free to follow the impulſe of the moment, to glide ſmoothly along the current of fancy, regardleſs of preſent conſequences, and of the final iſſue; this would be a fatal miſtake.

take. No—life was not given for ſuch purpoſes.—It was given to be enjoyed.—True; but it was alſo given to be improved. And how improved? For the honour of our Maker—for the benefit of our fellow-creatures—for our own advancement in wiſdom and goodneſs. I ſay, in wiſdom as well as goodneſs: for an underſtanding well exerciſed in the contemplation of truth, and well informed in the differences of things, is the only foundation of rational and honourable conduct.

How unjuſtly do men often argue?—God has given us capacities of pleaſure; and to neglect them would be ingratitude, and the worſt of impiety. He meant, he made them to be gratified.—Nothing more certain. But are we to ſtop here? Are theſe the only gifts of God which it is ſo impious, ſo fatal, to neglect? I thought we had accounted ourſelves rational beings, endued with

with a capacity of penetrating into the conſequences of things, and of directing our actions from the moſt extenſive views—from a foreſight of their remoteſt iſſues. And is this a capacity to be neglected? We pride ourſelves in our ſuperiority to the brute creation—but where is our ſuperiority, if we, like them, act merely from inſtinct?

What! ſhall a rational being, formed to expatiate through the eternity which is paſt, and actually intereſted in that which is to come, paſs a whole day without reflection? without converſing with the living or the dead upon any ſubject of importance? without any employment by which his own happineſs or that of others may be advanced, or even which can properly be called an exerciſe of his rational powers? Shall the precious hours of the morning be buried in ſloth, and thoſe of the evening be conſumed in folly? Shall the ſun riſe and ſet in bluſhes upon our diſſipation and degeneracy?

But

But what ſhall we ſay of ſpending day after day, and week after week—perhaps year after year—in a ſucceſſion of frivolous amuſements, in which the ſenſes and the imagination alone are occupied, and—meanwhile—not an hour employed in improving the underſtanding, or in correcting the heart—not the ſhorteſt interval in contemplating the works of the Almighty, or in meditating upon the words of eternal life—not one ſerious reflection upon any of the various duties which we owe to God or man!

And for what do we ſacrifice theſe immortal fruits of virtue? For weeds that are at once beautiful and poiſonous, or flowers that wither as ſoon as they are gathered. Alas! can it be to waſte the golden hours in unneceſſary ſleep, in the luxuries of the table, or in mere external accompliſhments and decorations? to mix in that kind of converſation which baniſhes, in a great meaſure, whatever

whatever can inſtruct or improve? or to relieve the inſipidity of unmeaning diſcourſe by amuſements ſtill more barren and unprofitable, though artfully contrived to occupy the attention, and intereſt the paſſions? to give ourſelves up to fictitious ſorrows or fictitious joys, and waſte upon the viſions of fancy thoſe ſenſibilities of heart which belong to the realities of life? or, laſtly, is it to paſs a conſiderable portion of every day in that torpid ſtate between ſleeping and waking, in which the powers of reaſon languiſh for want of exerciſe, and thoſe of the imagination are oppreſſed by being kept too long upon the ſtretch? Is it any of theſe which hinders us from living the life of reaſon and virtue?—For I forbear to mention thoſe ſtill more diſhonourable and pernicious purſuits, which, by oppreſſing the ſenſes, inflaming the paſſions, ſtupifying the underſtanding, and cor-

rupting the heart, diſqualify alike for action and enjoyment, impair the faculties both of body and mind, and lay the ſure foundation of miſery and deſtruction.

But though we may not plunge ſo deep in guilt, is it wiſe or noble to throw away life entirely upon trifles? What, am I to live for no higher purpoſe than the butterfly that flutters from flower to flower? with no object in view but to range through the different circles of diſſipation—no ſtudy, but to prepare for ſucceſſive ſcenes of unprofitable amuſement—no wiſh, but to ſhine and to be diſtinguiſhed there? This is, at beſt, a very inſignificant character: a very poor ambition for the aſpiring ſoul of man!

Could we, however, bring our minds to acquieſce contentedly in the midſt of ſo much inſignificance—yet to make amuſement our ſole purſuit is folly in the extreme,

treme, for this plain reaſon, becauſe it is impoſſible that we ſhould be always amuſed. The charm of novelty is quickly gone: the mind is beyond meaſure relaxed: a kind of uncomfortable liſtleſſneſs comes on, which cannot be ſhaken off: and every pleaſure is turned into pain. Now in this caſe, whither ſhall we betake ourſelves for relief? To ſerious employments? Alas! they are quite inſupportable. To our wonted amuſements? Alas! they are become inſipid by conſtant repetition, and yet, by the laws of habit, neceſſary to our exiſtence. — The only perſons capable of being amuſed are thoſe who are employed: for leiſure borrows all its charms from buſineſs, and reſt from labour: and to unbend the mind agreeably, you muſt firſt put it upon the vigorous exertion of its faculties. Nor does he, whoſe nerves were never ſtrung with toil, whoſe mind was never fatigued with

action, know any thing of the blandiſhments of ſoft repoſe.

It has been obſerved by thoſe who have been moſt celebrated as men both of buſineſs and pleaſure, that the buſieſt part of their lives was generally the moſt pleaſurable. The man who has been uſefully and well employed, brings a mind prepared to taſte the moſt ſimple and moderate pleaſures. He neither comes to the banquet with an imagination already cloyed, nor with that faſtidious delicacy which is the parent of diſappointment and diſguſt. He has no inward upbraidings, nor miſgivings; no painful conſciouſneſs of want of merit; no ſecret voice recalling him to the diſcharge of neglected duties, or reminding him of the forgotten claims of religion, friendſhip, gratitude, compaſſion, beneficence, and virtue.

Value

Value pleaſure then as much as you will; yet, for the love of pleaſure itſelf, provide ſome retreat to fly to, when every amuſement ſhall grow painful or inſipid. This is neceſſary, even when life is new; when the love of pleaſure glows in all its ardour; when youth, and health, and gaiety, alive to every joy, invite you to partake of it without reſtraint. But if you acquire an inveterate habit of trifling in youth, think, what muſt become of you when grey hairs come on; when the mind naturally aſſumes a more ſedate and thoughtful turn! Can you endure to think of ſtill going round and round the ſame beaten track of inſipidity and folly? without the ſenſe of preſent pleaſure, or the proſpect of future good? the ſcorn and deriſion of the gay? the contempt and pity of the wiſe?

As you would juſtly dread this fate, let ſome portion of your time, even from the earlieſt period, be redeemed from the

devouring gulf of pleaſure and amuſement, in order to be conſecrated to more ſerious, more honourable purſuits, which, upon reflection, your hearts can approve. Then, as years advance and life declines, you may retire more like a well ſatisfied gueſt than a melancholy exile, from thoſe gaieties which are beginning to loſe their attractions. And, as the leaves which autumn ſheds are amply compenſated by her fruits, ſo the place of former pleaſures will be well ſupplied by entertainments—more ſedate indeed, but perhaps not leſs delightful—where reaſon has larger ſcope, and fancy leſs—while the heart may ſtill glow warmly, though temperately, without renouncing the underſtanding, or blowing the paſſions into a flame.

Happy the man, whoſe declining years are enlivened by the remembrance of his youth; who can ſtill grow young again, in the recollection of ſcenes where the

ſweetneſs of pleaſure was heightened by the flavour of innocence, where the fire of youth gave ardor to the ſpirit of virtue, while it was tempered and ſubdued by the mild influences of religion!

But, if it be wiſe to provide ſources of conſolation for an advanced ſeaſon of life, how much more neceſſary is it to remember its final cloſe! When this world, and all its pleaſurable ſcenes, ſhall appear like ſhadows flitting before us; when we are juſt going to ſurrender ourſelves into the hands of our Creator, to wait his ſentence; what confuſion and deſpair muſt fill that mind which has been ſo wrapped up in the gaieties of life, and enveloped in ſuch a cloud of vanity, that no ray of religion, no ſpark of generous virtue, could ſhine through! —Sweetly as pleaſure once appeared to ſmile, and innocent and harmleſs as the hours devoted to it ſeemed to glide along, yet, at the end of this career, when every

outward joy is withered, and the ſoul turns inward for conſolation, to experience a miſerable void—to look back, and to be preſented with a mere blank, inſtead of an honourable and uſeful life—to be ſeparated from all that endears the preſent, without the hope of happineſs in a future ſtate—what a melancholy proſpect! Yet this muſt one day be the fate of him who has lived to pleaſure, and forſaken God.

Nor will ſuch a life, at the cloſe, merely deprive the ſoul of conſolation: for it is full of guilt, and the deepeſt ingratitude. What can be more ſo, than to revel licentiouſly amidſt the bounties of Providence, at once regardleſs of the mercy from which they flow, and of the end for which they are given? Alas! you conſider not the conſequence—theſe are pleaſures to which you have no right; you have not paid the price which Providence has ſet upon them: and, if you

ſeize

ſeize upon the luſcious bait, it will be followed with the ſting of guilt, and the curſe of God.

" Rejoice, O young man, in thy " youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in " the days of thy youth, and walk in " the ways of thine heart, and in the " ſight of thine eyes; but know thou, " that for all theſe things God will bring " thee into judgment[a]."

Far be it, however, from the friends of religion to rob mankind of one innocent delight, or to pluck up by the root a ſingle flower, which might either grace the ſteps of manly virtue, or cheer the melancholy pilgrim on his way. We call upon you not to renounce pleaſures, but to enjoy them. Enjoy pleaſures with innocence, and reflect upon them with ſatisfaction. Enjoy them with a cheer-

[a] Eccleſ. xi. 9.

ful

ful heart, and be grateful to the Giver. Enjoy them with moderation, and you ſhall enjoy them long. Enjoy them in ſubordination to benevolence and virtue, and you ſhall have a peaceful retreat when pleaſures fail. But let not your mind be drawn aſide by the allurements of pleaſure from the path of duty. Let not any important obligation to God or man be violated or ſuſpended. Waſte not that time which ſhould be conſecrated to knowledge, or piety, or friendſhip, or compaſſion, or general good-will. Then take care that your amuſements be, as far as poſſible, manly, ingenuous, and improving: and wiſdom herſelf will look on with ſmiles of approbation. Even virtue will not refuſe to join hand in hand with pleaſure: and, with ſuch companions, religion will aſſume a more amiable aſpect, a more elevated mien.

You will enjoy pleaſures indeed, even in this world—ſuch as God and man may behold

behold with complacency! And in the world to come, you will be admitted to that "fulneſs of joy which flows at "God's right hand, and to rivers of plea-"ſures for evermore."

SERMON VI.

ON THE EXISTENCE OF EVIL.

Iſaiah xlv. 7. *I form the light, and create darkneſs: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all theſe things.*

THESE words naturally lead us to inquire into the grand objection againſt Providence, ariſing from the Exiſtence of Evil: an objection which has occaſioned ſome degree of perplexity to reflecting minds in all ages. That ſuch a noxious plant ſhould ſpring from a ſalutary root—that ſuch a poiſonous ſtream ſhould flow from

from the fountain of goodneſs itſelf, and be found in the fair garden of the univerſe—is an appearance ſo aſtoniſhing, as to leave but little hope of its being fully explained.

Let us not, however, ſhrink from the inquiry. For Infinite Goodneſs, if it exiſts, muſt be conſpicuous; though we cannot expect to fathom the counſels of Infinite Wiſdom.

The grandeur and beauty of nature, the cheerful aſpect of ſociety, the mutual aid and ſympathy between man and man, the ardour of common purſuits, and the natural progreſſion of knowledge, virtue, and happineſs—open the moſt pleaſing views, and clearly diſcover the Father of the Univerſe. Still the exiſtence of pains, diſeaſes, crimes, and miſery, in a thouſand dreadful forms, we cannot deny. Whence this harſh diſcord amidſt the general harmony?

From

From the wonderful mixture of good and evil which runs through all nature, aroſe among the eaſtern nations the opinion that the univerſe was governed by two beings of equal power but of oppoſite characters: an opinion which, though now almoſt exploded, is ſupported by ſuch arguments as, at firſt view, are not unplauſible.

If, ſay its advocates, we aſcribe the enjoyments of life to a benevolent principle in the Author of nature, why ſhould we not aſcribe the ſufferings of life to a principle of malevolence? And, certainly, it is more conſonant with reaſon, that principles ſo oppoſite ſhould be found in two diſtinct and independent beings, than in one and the ſame.

Againſt this notion many declarations in ſcripture are expreſsly pointed, eſpecially the words of our text; which, upon looking back to the beginning of the chapter,

chapter, we find addreſſed to Cyrus, in whoſe country this opinion was moſt prevalent. And to give the words all poſſible ſolemnity, the Almighty himſelf is introduced declaring that Good and Evil, Light and Darkneſs, have One ſource, and originate in his Eternal Providence.—To ſhew that this is the language of reaſon and nature, no leſs than of ſcripture, and how it may be reconciled with the Infinite Goodneſs of God, is the deſign of this diſcourſe.

Firſt then, it is inconceivable that two beings equal and independent, and, at the the ſame time, oppoſite to each other as light and darkneſs, ſhould be capable of acting by mutual conſent, or of uniting in the accompliſhment of one plan; becauſe there could be no poſſible ground of ſo unnatural an union, which would not involve either the total ſuſpenſion of their powers, or ſubverſion of their empires. Such beings therefore could never meet but as irreconcileable enemies, and the

the only intercourſe of which they are capable is war.

But where is that prodigious confuſion and enormous ruin, the dreadful monuments of the battles of theſe contending powers, which muſt, on this ſuppoſition, overſpread the face of the univerſe? On the contrary, in the great works of nature we find no traces of furious hoſtility, or even of jarring counſels. With an exactneſs unparalleled by human art, the orbs of heaven go their eternal rounds; and all their movements are perfectly conſiſtent and harmonious.

If then, between theſe ſuppoſed potentates there be no appearance of war, nor any poſſibility of alliance; what remains, but that from mutual averſion and mutual dread, they dwell in regions of eternal ſeparation, where their oppoſite natures are gratified without control; the one, amidſt ſcenes of unmixed happineſs,

the other, of uninterrupted misery? But where are the regions in which happiness flourishes without alloy? or in which misery is sunk in total despair? Good and Evil are the joint produce of every climate and of every soil: both spring from the same objects; are linked together by an indissoluble chain; and interwoven in the very texture of our frame and our condition. There is not a blessing that we enjoy, which is not capable of wounding the heart; nor a single affliction within the compass of human life, which is not connected with a long train of enjoyments.

As Good and Evil therefore are thus inseparable, they should be considered in connection, as both together the workmanship of One Sovereign Mind, and as forming One system. Of the system itself we are to judge, by its prevailing character. According to the predominance of happiness or of misery, we may pronounce

nounce it good or evil. And if, upon a fair compariſon, we find that though the exiſtence of miſery cannot be denied, there is yet a conſiderable overbalance of happineſs, we may juſtly conclude that it is the reſult of a benevolent adminiſtration.

How then ſhall we determine this queſtion? They are but a ſmall number of mankind that we are acquainted with; and, with reſpect to this number, we are very ill qualified to determine the degree of their ſufferings or their enjoyments. We ſhould be greatly at a loſs to eſtimate thoſe of our moſt intimate friends. We even cannot decide upon the exact proportion of our own. Much leſs can we form an adequate idea of all the pleaſures and pains, the joys and griefs of all the individuals, families, and nations, which are diſperſed over the face of the earth. This were far beyond the reach of our obſervation, as well as of our ſagacity.

It is plain, therefore, that we can judge of the complexion of the univerſe only by conſidering the influence of thoſe General Laws by which every event is produced, and which operate invariably at all times, in all places, upon all individuals. And if we find that theſe general laws are univerſally benevolent, notwithſtanding the evils unavoidably connected with them, we may rationally conclude that the world is, upon the whole, happy.

But why were general laws eſtabliſhed at all, when ſo much miſery is the reſult?

That general laws are not only conſiſtent with, but neceſſarily flow from the goodneſs of God, will appear, if we reflect that man is an aſſemblage of various powers, the exertion of which conſtitutes his proper happineſs; and that, were the univerſe not governed by general

neral laws, or were theſe laws not diſcoverable by man, he could neither have any incitement to action, nor any ſphere of activity; but, ever conſcious of powers which he was doomed never to exert, or to exert in vain, he muſt at laſt ſink into a ſtate of utter deſpondency.

Suppoſing then the human mind to be ſuch as we know it is, it was neceſſary that through all nature there ſhould not only be a conſtitution of general laws, but that theſe laws ſhould be maintained inviolable. For every interruption muſt be proportionably attended with the ſame pernicious effects as would ariſe from their being totally aboliſhed. No private intereſt of individuals, therefore, no public good but of the moſt general and important nature, nothing but what deeply affects the grand deſign of creation, can induce the Creator to violate the eſtabliſhed order of the univerſe; and to ex-

pect ſuch an interpoſition, on any other occaſion, would be juſt as abſurd as to refuſe our aſſent to it, on this.

If the foregoing reaſoning be allowed, it only remains to examine diſtinctly the ſeveral kinds of Evil which exiſt in the world; and to ſhew that they may all be traced up to certain general laws, which, though the occaſional ſources of miſery, yet in their original deſign are moſt benevolent, and in their conſtant effects moſt ſalutary.

For this purpoſe, we ſhall confine ourſelves chiefly to the conſideration of man; not only becauſe the human frame is what we are beſt acquainted with, but alſo becauſe, within the compaſs of this, we find all the varieties of evil which infeſt the whole creation. For as the nature of man is partly animal and partly rational, he is not only liable to the ſame external

external evils as the inferior creatures, but alſo expoſed to many internal evils, from which they are exempt. Let us take a diſtinct view of both parts of his frame, of the general laws to which both are ſubject, and of the evils reſulting from theſe laws reſpectively.

Firſt, when we reflect upon the human body; having its baſis formed of ſolid bone; clothed with ſinews and muſcles, adapted to every variety of motion; ſtrung with nerves, and nouriſhed by veins and arteries, branching throughout its whole ſubſtance, as well as furniſhed with many curious organs of ſenſe; it appears to be conſtructed in the moſt perfect manner for agility, ſtrength, ornament, and ſubſerviency to the mind. Yet notwithſtanding this admirable conſtruction of our frame, the ſeveral parts of which it is compoſed are liable to be frequently deranged; in conſequence of which they

are diſabled for their reſpective functions, and, inſtead of miniſtering to eaſe and enjoyment, become avenues to pain and diſeaſe. Whence theſe derangements, with all their fatal effects? If we trace them to their ultimate ſource, we ſhall find that they ariſe from thoſe general laws, on which depend not only the welfare, but the exiſtence, both of the individual and of the ſpecies.

Since the body, by being kept in conſtant action, is liable to conſiderable waſte; what can be more admirable than the ample proviſion of food which Providence has made for all living creatures! But when the ſupply is more or leſs than adequate to the waſte, the effect is, and muſt be, various diſeaſes, and untimely death. Nor is this conſtitution repugnant to benevolence: ſince it is calculated both to excite that induſtry which is as neceſſary to the enjoyment as to the ſupport of life;

and

and to ſet bounds to that luxurious indulgence which, while it is fatal to the higher pleaſures of the mind, would deprive numbers of neceſſary ſuſtenance, in order to gratify one inſatiate appetite.

Not leſs neceſſary than food is the air we breathe. Accordingly, there is the higheſt reaſon to adore the wiſdom of Providence, which has diffuſed this wonderful fluid ſo abundantly round the earth. Yet it is corrupted, even in miniſtering to life; and thoſe very gales, ſo balmy and refreſhing, oftentimes carry on their wings a fatal poiſon. And when, to purify the atmoſphere, winds are let looſe, the ſea is thrown into commotion, and the land deſolated with tempeſts. But who would wiſh this fountain of univerſal life to be annihilated, becauſe, when ſtagnant, it is the medium of contagion, and, when agitated, of tempeſts?

Again,

Again, from that law whereby all creatures derive their origin from others of the ſame ſpecies, ariſe all the tender relations of human life; and, along with them, the moſt amiable affections of human nature: yet, in conſequence hereof, what a complicated train of miſeries is brought into the world! Hence thoſe intemperate purſuits of pleaſure, which enervate the body and corrupt the mind. Hence thoſe hereditary diſeaſes, which often flow through the veins of ſucceſſive generations. Hence ſome of the moſt fatal diſorders which prevail in ſociety—the moſt tragical events which are recorded in the hiſtory of mankind. And thus the moſt deſtructive evils inſinuate themſelves, where Providence has been viſibly moſt attentive to our good.

Nor, in this reſpect, is there any difference betwixt internal diſeaſes and external accidents.

Deriving

Deriving numberleſs advantages from our connexion with the creation around us, and for this purpoſe formed of the like materials, our bodies are neceſſarily ſubject to the ſame laws which affect all ſimilar ſubſtances. Whatſoever has the power of burning, bruiſing, piercing or deſtroying the texture of other bodies, will neceſſarily produce the ſame effects on the body of man. Yet, by means of theſe very qualities which render them hurtful and deſtructive, they become moſt valuable bleſſings, and greatly contribute to render the world a commodious and agreeable habitation.

Thus fire, that active penetrating element, which ſcarcely any ſubſtance can reſiſt, compounds ſome bodies, and ſeparates others; hardens the ſoft, and diſſolves the hard; and, with the aid of human ſkill, cauſes them to aſſume variety of forms both uſeful and ornamental. When applied in a more moderate de-

gree,

gree, it diffuſes a grateful warmth, ſupplies both to animals and vegetables the place of the ſun in his abſence, tempers the rigour of inclement ſeaſons and the coldeſt climates, and changes into a comfortable abode ſome of the moſt inhoſpitable parts of the globe. Yet by this moſt uſeful element, when it rages beyond the uſual boundaries, we ſee the bounties of nature and the productions of art at once deſtroyed; and not only the moſt valuable poſſeſſions, but even the lives of men, become a prey to its deſtructive violence.

In like manner the oppoſite element of water, whoſe benefits cannot be enumerated; the invaluable metal, without which ſcarcely any of the arts can ſubſiſt a moment; the ſtrong timber, ſo uſeful in framing our habitations; the hard ſtone, which laſts from age to age without decay; and all the natural productions which the earth offers to human ingenuity, may become

become the dreadful miniſters of death. But the advantages ariſing from them are continual, and the evils only incidental.

If from its productions we extend our view to the globe itſelf, we find it ſituated in ſuch a manner that its inhabitants may receive the leaſt poſſible injury, and the greateſt poſſible advantage. The ſun is ſo placed as to warm and enlighten, without conſuming it. The moon is ſufficiently near to raiſe the tides of the ſea, without overwhelming the land. And the immeaſureable diſtance of the ſtars, which adorn the firmament, prevents them from ſenſibly diminiſhing the coolneſs of the night. Yet, after all, we are not exempt from ſcorching ſummers, and freezing winters; and while one part of the globe is expoſed to ſultry heats, the oppoſite part is equally expoſed to piercing cold. This very circumſtance, however, demonſtrates that the preſent ſituation of the earth is the moſt eligible.

Suſpended

Suſpended as it is between the two fierce extremes of heat and cold, no region of it is uninhabitable. But were either of theſe extremes to be increaſed, half mankind muſt be conſumed, or frozen into ſtatues. And thus, notwithſtanding our experience of partial inconveniences, we can trace the operation of benevolence and order, from the world which we inhabit, to the remoteſt regions of the univerſe.

From the foregoing inſtances it appears that bodily diſeaſes and accidents are the effect of general laws, which could not be aboliſhed without introducing much greater evil. But beſides this, from the uniform operation of theſe laws, we are enabled for the moſt part to avail ourſelves of their advantages, and eſcape their inconveniences. Accordingly, we find no malady, no diſaſter, to which the human frame is liable, however terrible in its ſymptoms, which is not to be removed, or at leaſt mitigated, by thoſe healing

powers which reſide in almoſt every region of nature. What then is wanting but ſome powerful inſtinct, which may outſtrip the ſlow procedure of reaſon, and irreſiſtibly impel us to ſeek for that relief which Providence has prepared?

Conſider, therefore, what expedient nature employs to allure us to thoſe things which are conducive to our being or well-being. Has ſhe not to theſe invariably annexed the ſenſation of pleaſure? What then ought to be connected with that which tends to our hurt or deſtruction but the oppoſite ſenſation of pain? By the former we are drawn with a pleaſing violence to whatever is beneficial: by the latter we are repelled and thrown at a diſtance from whatever is injurious. The latter, therefore, is no leſs friendly to man than the former. And how kindly has Providence diſtributed them both! For ſuppoſe only for a moment pleaſure and pain to be reverſed.

verſed. Let pleaſure for the future preſide over ſickneſs; let health become ſubject to the dominion of pain; let tearing and burning the fleſh produce agreeable ſenſations; let the agonies of death be converted into exquiſite enjoyment: to what a miſerable, mangled, mutilated ſpecies would mankind be reduced! To what a ſhort-lived generation of beings! —And how quickly would the earth become a deſart!—But now thoſe pains which are incident to the human body are in fact the guardians of its ſafety and proſperity. When ſickneſs invades, they incite us to ſeek for relief. When deſtruction approaches, they inſtantly give the alarm, and bring others to our aſſiſtance. And therefore they are ſo far from affording a juſt ſubject of complaint, that to them we are indebted not only for the perfection of our organs, but even for the preſervation of our lives.

SERMON

SERMON VII.

ON THE EXISTENCE OF EVIL.

Iſaiah xlv. 7. *I form the light, and create darkneſs: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all theſe things.*

HAVING conſidered the evils which immediately affect the body, let us proceed to conſider thoſe which immediately affect the mind. Theſe are, certainly, the moſt laſting; perhaps, the moſt exquiſite, of which our natures are capable. Yet if we examine with attention the General Laws from which

they ſpring, we ſhall ſtill find their Great Author wiſe and benevolent.

For there is no principle in the human mind which is not calculated to promote private and public happineſs: though, at the ſame time, there is none, however excellent and beneficial, which, by being miſguided in its aim, obſtructed in its operation, or diſappointed of its end, does not neceſſarily ſubject us to the poſſibility of ſuffering.

The deſire of knowledge, for example, muſt be allowed to be productive of numberleſs advantages and pleaſures. Yet this is often attended with painful anxiety, and often terminates in diſappointment. The univerſal wiſh to be eſteemed and beloved, ſo friendly to all that is uſeful and amiable, has not ſeldom been fatal to individuals, and pernicious to ſociety. Even ſympathy, the

cordial

cordial of life, may, in ſome caſes, ſerve only to diffuſe a ſenſe of pain, when it is impoſſible to adminiſter relief. Yet, notwithſtanding theſe occaſional evils, the general good tendency and beneficial effects of all theſe principles are too obvious to be denied.

Of all the paſſions of our nature, Anger appears to be the leaſt favourable to human happineſs, ſince it is painful in the immediate ſenſation, and often terrible in its effects. But who does not perceive, that to take away the dread both of private and public reſentment, would leave the weak too defenceleſs againſt the powerful? and yet, were ſo dangerous a paſſion accompanied with no pain, men would not be ſufficiently on their guard againſt its exceſſes. In ſhort, there is not a ſingle principle which God has implanted within us that does not diſplay his wiſ-

dom and benevolence; and he has, moreover, given us Reaſon, to be the Sovereign Controller and Director of them all.

Reaſon itſelf, however, though undoubtedly the greateſt of bleſſings, is alſo the moſt comprehenſive evil; for, by bringing within our view the paſt and the future, it inconceivably enlarges the bounds of human miſery. Yet ſince the knowledge of evil is requiſite in order to avoid it, we ought not to conſider thoſe regrets and anxieties which are inſeparable from this knowledge as grievous and intolerable appendages to the calamities of life, but rather as wiſe and ſalutary preſervatives againſt them.

Nor, did we always make a right uſe of our rational powers, ſhould we have ſo much cauſe to complain of the remaining

maining evils of our condition. Theſe would not be very numerous or very conſiderable; and would be abundantly overbalanced by happineſs. But here lies the main difficulty. Why is reaſon, the guide of life, ſo often found unequal to its office? Why are not all our powers directed to their proper uſe, and all our affections harmonized into perfect concord? Whence that ſtruggle between what is pleaſant and what is honourable, between private and public happineſs, between preſent and future good? and eſpecially whence comes it to paſs, that, in this ſtruggle, the baſeſt and worſt principles often prove the ſtrongeſt, that the gratification of a moment is allowed to blaſt the faireſt hopes of futurity, that private audacity riots in the midſt of public calamities, and the body tramples upon the mind? In ſhort — For what end was a race of

beings created, with paſſions ſo ungovernable, and reaſon ſo imperfect, that it too often becomes the Miniſter, rather than the Controller of the paſſions; while the great law of habit, which was doubtleſs intended to give ſtability to virtue, ſtamps deep the characters of vice, and renders it inveterate and incurable?

In order to obtain as ſatisfactory an anſwer as poſſible to this queſtion, it will be neceſſary to take a comprehenſive view of the ſyſtem of the univerſe. And here, as we are obliged to reaſon from analogy, we can only proceed upon probable conjecture. Few are the creatures of God, which lie open to our inſpection; chiefly thoſe below us; yet through all theſe we behold a regular line of ſubordination; and we are capable of perceiving that this is the effect of conſummate wiſdom and goodneſs.

For,

For, ſuppoſing there were upon the earth as many men as the earth could poſſibly contain, there might ſtill be vaſt numbers of beaſts, birds, fiſhes, and inſects; and were all the inferior creatures to be excluded, it would render the condition of man leſs eligible, beſides impoveriſhing the general ſtock of happineſs. Accordingly, if, from the ſuperior eminence aſſigned to our own nature, we take a view of the ſcale of exiſtence, we may deſcend, by an almoſt imperceptible gradation, through an immenſe variety of ranks, till we find ourſelves, at length, upon the very confines of inanimate matter, or rather of nothing; yet even here, beings ſtill more and more diminutive ſeem to ariſe, which not only mock our ſenſes, but leave behind all human comprehenſion.

From this gradation of thoſe below, we have reaſon to apprehend a more aſtoniſhing gradation of thoſe above us,

one ſurpaſſing another in perfection and happineſs, till we arrive at beings far more exalted above the condition of man, than man is above the meaneſt inſect. From man to God, doubtleſs there is ample room for millions of orders of intelligent beings. Nay, we may enlarge and aggrandize the idea, till the powers of conception fail. For if the infinity of ſpace be the grand theatre, in which the Deity diſplays his attributes, what wonders of creative energy may not be contained within this vaſt circumference! Pile together in imagination the power and the intelligence, not of individual beings, but of worlds united: redouble them ten thouſand times: endeavour to riſe to the idea of a ſeraph, worthy to ſtand at the ſummit of creation: ſtill, this moſt excellent of creatures, compared with the Creator, muſt neceſſarily be imperfect; and is perhaps of all creatures the moſt conſcious of being ſo. As we de-

ſcend

ſcend in the ſcale of exiſtence, there muſt be greater and greater imperfection down to man. All the beings inferior to man appear to be under the government of mere inſtinct. It is therefore reaſonable to conclude, that man belongs to the loweſt order of rational beings, which it is conſiſtent with the wiſdom and goodneſs of God to create; and conſequently, we may expect to find in our own ſpecies, the greateſt poſſible degree of imperfection.

Nor ought we to repine at our lot, ſince Providence has wiſely adapted our powers to our rank and condition, and, by this means, has probably conſulted our particular happineſs no leſs than the general good of the univerſe. For, as a brute, endowed with the rational and moral powers of man, would not only be leſs uſeful, but far leſs happy; ſo were man poſſeſſed of the capacities of ſuperior beings, he would inevitably either

either encroach upon their happineſs, or, if ſtill confined within his own ſphere, muſt himſelf become ſuperlatively wretched.

But though that portion of intelligence, however ſmall, which falls to our ſhare, is meaſured out to us with conſummate wiſdom; yet how is it poſſible for beings, ſcarcely emerging above mere animal exiſtence, having ſuch broken and fluctuating views of things, expoſed inceſſantly to the influence of ſurrounding objects, and bewildered by a thouſand fallacious appearances, while every thing around them is magnified, diminiſhed, or diſtorted from its real form,—how is it poſſible for ſuch beings, involved as they are in a perpetual miſt, not to be continually miſtaking Error for Truth, Evil for Good, and conſequently not to be continually bringing miſery upon themſelves, and upon thoſe with whom they are connected?

Hence

Hence thoſe diſproportioned deſires, and headlong purſuits; thoſe claſhing intereſts and fierce contentions; and all the ſcenes of complicated folly and injuſtice, with which the world abounds.

Dark however as the proſpect around us may appear, while the light of reaſon ſeems almoſt extinguiſhed by the ſtorm of contending paſſions; there is notwithſtanding a conſtant tendency in reaſon to gain the aſcendant — a tendency encouraged by the general conſtitution of the world, than which perhaps nothing can be conceived more hoſtile to vice, or more friendly to virtue. Hence ariſes the ſtrongeſt preſumption, that as mankind become more generally acquainted with their nature and their ſtate, they will gradually become more virtuous, and conſequently more happy. Viewed in this light the proſpect brightens, and probably will continue to brighten throughout the ſucceſ-

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ſion of ages—not to mention the natural and reaſonable expectation of a future ſtate, which alone can afford due ſcope to our growing capacities of knowledge, virtue, and happineſs. Meanwhile, in the commencement of this great plan, Evil is made to combat Evil, and Miſery ſets bounds to Guilt. Otherwiſe, an univerſal deluge of crimes would break in; the bands of ſociety would be diſſolved; the harmony of the world ſubverted; and the human race extinguiſhed.

But Infinite Wiſdom converts the guilty paſſions of men into engines of their own puniſhment and correction. Thus pain and diſeaſe wait upon exceſs: the natural reſentment of mankind is ever in arms againſt inhumanity and injuſtice: while remorſe purſues crimes of every deſcription; and the awful forebodings of conſcience, which create ſo much ſecret terror to the guilty individual,

individual, are the great ſafeguard of the peace and welfare of ſociety at large.

It is true, ſo many reſtraints cannot be impoſed upon the paſſions and conduct of mankind without ſubjecting them to conſiderable ſuffering. But what would be the conſequence, if all theſe bars were burſt aſunder? Would the happineſs of the world be, on the whole, increaſed or diminiſhed? or, rather, could the world itſelf, for the ſhorteſt ſpace, continue to ſubſiſt?

Thoſe evils, therefore, which are the natural puniſhment of vice, are, doubtleſs, in the higheſt degree, ſalutary and benevolent. But what ſhall we ſay of thoſe evils which ariſe, without our own fault, from the courſe of nature? Are theſe inconſiſtent with wiſdom and benevolence? Certainly not. For if a continual flow of proſperity tends to enervate

vate and corrupt the mind, then ſome intervals of affliction may be neceſſary to brace and ſtrengthen it; and if this diſcipline be requiſite for the moſt perfect, much more for the mixed characters of the generality of mankind.

Hence, in every age, adverſity has been reſpected as the ſchool of virtue. There the world is unmaſked: there the voice of conſcience is heard: and the claims of futurity are felt. There, if any where, we are taught humility: the tear of penitence begins to flow: the ſoul is attuned to ſympathy: fortitude and ſelf-command are called forth: reſignation bows ſubmiſſive to the decree of Providence: while faith and hope lift our views and deſires to heaven.

From the vale of ſorrow, how changed, how refined, do we return to the active and pleaſurable ſcenes of life! As the verdure and fragrance ſucceeding to a

ſummer's ſhower; ſo pure and ſerene, ſo rich in virtue, ſo flouriſhing in every generous ſentiment, and endearing quality, is the mind which affliction has impregnated with the ſeed of celeſtial happineſs!

Ceaſe then, O man, to arraign the wiſdom and goodneſs of thy Maker: and rather learn to follow the example of his Providence, by extracting from the moſt bitter plants their concealed virtues. With a heart full of grateful adoration, look up to him, both when he pours upon thee the bright beams of joy, and when, with the ſame benevolent deſign, he raiſes the cloud of ſorrow. What proportion of either ſhall divide thy lot, leave to his ſovereign diſpoſal, who graſps the whole extent of nature within his view, and penetrates into the moſt retired receſſes of futurity.

"High as the heaven is above the earth, ſo high are the ways of God above ourways." No human comprehenſion is capable of following them through their long train of conſequences; of viewing them in all their complicated connexions; or of deriving them, by every intermediate ſtep, from their remote cauſes. It is evidently the will of the Supreme Being, that we ſhould remain ignorant of the reaſons of many of his diſpenſations; and this ignorance may be neceſſary, not only for the trial of our virtue, but in order to promote our own comfort, as well as to preſerve the order of the univerſe.

Thus far we are permitted to know: that though good and evil are, in moſt caſes, inſeparably connected, yet every part of the works of nature, and particularly of our own frame, tends to private and public happineſs: that the evils of the body are either

ther immediately ſalutary, or ſpring from general laws which are ſo: that thoſe of the mind ariſe, partly, from principles and paſſions, in themſelves excellent and eſſential to our welfare, partly, from that feeble and imperfect reaſon, which beſt befits our rank and ſtation among the creatures of God: that thoſe evils which ariſe from the frailty of our nature, are requiſite to reſtrain us from vice: that all the evils of life, from whatever ſource they ariſe, may be rendered greatly conducive to our improvement in virtue: and conſequently, that if we had proſperity and adverſity in our own choice, a wiſe man would rather leave the determination to God than take it upon himſelf.

"Who knoweth what is good for man?" But could we look through the whole plan of Providence—could we view ourſelves as connected with all Mankind—could we contemplate man-

kind with reference to diſtant worlds and beings of a higher order—could we trace the progreſſion of our ſpecies through all future ages, and purſue the preſent into a ſtate of eternal retribution —then, moſt aſſuredly, all the evils of which we complain, like ſhadows at noon day, which owe their exiſtence to the ſurrounding ſplendour, would appear to originate in the Fountain of Univerſal Happineſs: and thoſe who ſhall at laſt be raiſed above the obſcurity of terreſtrial things, will find that "God is light, and "in him is no darkneſs at all;" that he is the father of his creatures; that his very eſſence is love, and that he dwelleth in love for ever and ever.

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

ON TEMPERANCE.

1 Cor. ix 25. *And every man that ſtriveth for the maſtery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.*

TEMPERANCE is a habit of reſiſting our inclinations, when the indulgence of them becomes inconſiſtent with a greater good. This virtue is diſtinguiſhed by various names, according to the particular inclination, which it is applied to regulate. Conſidered with reſpect to the appetites of the body, it is termed ſobriety: to the purſuit of riches, moderation: to the love of honour and fame, humility. Its general nature is the ſame in all.

It is the firſt of theſe, namely Sobriety, or a proper regulation of the bodily appetites, to which the Apoſtle in our text refers; as appears from the compariſon which he uſes to illuſtrate it. The Chriſtian diſcipline he compares to the ſtrict regimen obſerved by the competitors at the Olympic games; but, at the ſame time, repreſents the infinite diſproportion of the conteſts, and the unſpeakable ſuperiority of the motives, which a Chriſtian has "to be temperate in all "things." For "they do it to ob-"tain a corruptible crown; but we an "incorruptible." To be preſented with an olive-garland in the preſence of all Greece — what were this to that unfading crown which ſhall be placed upon the head of the victorious Chriſtian, amidſt the general aſſembly of men and angels! Yet incomparably greater and more glorious as the rewards of the Chriſtian are, the diſcipline to which he is ſubject is neither ſo ſtrict nor ſo ſevere as that of the competitors at theſe celebrated

celebrated games. The latter were obliged to ſubmit, for a long time, to the moſt rigid abſtemiouſneſs and the greateſt bodily fatigue. They were confined to a particular kind of diet. Their whole manner of living was ſubjected to a variety of irkſome and painful reſtraints. And yet, after all, their reward was precarious, and ſome muſt of neceſſity return in obſcurity or diſgrace.

But that temperance which Chriſtianity enjoins preſcribes no ſuch ſeverities. Of meats and drinks the goſpel knows no diſtinction; and tells us that every creature of God may be received with thankſgiving. We are not forbidden to eat fleſh like the Banians; nor to drink wine, like the Mahometans. Nor can any thing be more evident from the general ſtrain of our Saviour's doctrine, than that no auſterities could be enjoined by him but ſuch as are, on the whole, not deſtructive, but rather ſalutary to the body; at the

ſame time that they are neceſſary or expedient to eſtabliſh the empire of the mind.

A life of ſtarving abſtinence is therefore no more required, than of that painful unremitting toil, which exhauſts the powers of nature. On the contrary, our Saviour himſelf, "whoſe "meat and whoſe drink it was to do "the will of his heavenly Father," was far from being auſtere in his manner of living. His great ſoul was ſuperior to every ſcrupulous or ſuperſtitious peculiarity. One of the firſt miracles he wrought, was, turning water into wine, to grace the ſolemnity of a marriage feſtival. He neither affected an unnatural ſecluſion from the world, nor practiſed the uſeleſs mortifications of an hermit. The generous, ſocial virtues were his in all their luſtre and in all their excellence. And I know of nothing which gives us an higher idea of his character, than thoſe malicious clamours of his ene-

mies,

mies, that he was "a gluttonous man, "and a wine-bibber, and a friend of "publicans and ſinners." For hence we are naturally led to conceive of him, as all condeſcending gentleneſs and kindneſs; though doubtleſs immaculate, as purity itſelf.

That temperance, therefore, which, as Chriſtians, we are bound to practiſe, lies in a juſt medium between unreaſonable abſtinence on the one hand, and gluttony and drunkenneſs on the other;—or rather between uſeleſs ſelf-denial, and hurtful indulgence—For there is a regular, and, if it may be ſo expreſſed, a moderate kind of intemperance, which conſiſts in eating and drinking conſtantly to exceſs; though it be carried, in no ſingle inſtance, to a loathſome or ſhocking extreme.

To lay the foundation of this virtue right, reflect, for what end God implanted the appetites of hunger and thirſt.

Doubtleſs, that we might be prompted to ſeek thoſe ſupplies of food, which are neceſſary to the ſupport of life. But if theſe ſupplies be either more or leſs than adequate to this end, it cannot but be productive of pernicious effects. We have no ſtandard, by which to judge of this, but the ſenſations of hunger and thirſt, regulated by experience. Perhaps, if luxury were entirely baniſhed from our tables, and perfect ſimplicity prevailed in our manner of living, theſe ſenſations might be ſufficient, without any other guide. But in the artificial modes of living, which prevail in towns and cities amidſt the want of exerciſe, and the refinements of luxury, it may be neceſſary to call in the aid of experience: and though by the goodneſs of Providence that which is moſt grateful to an unvitiated taſte, is commonly moſt ſalutary; yet we ought to conſult reaſon as well as inclination, as to what will be conducive to the ſoundneſs of the mind, as well as of the body.

He

He who moſt carefully attends to this rule, and moſt faithfully reduces it to practice, is entitled to the praiſe of being the moſt temperate man.

Now temperance is a virtue, than which none is more viſibly favoured by Providence; as there is no violation of our duty, which is followed by more certain, or more dreadful puniſhment, than habitual exceſs.

Temperate pleaſures are the higheſt. The health and ſpirits that attend them are the moſt genuine, and the ſlumbers that follow them moſt refreſhing and ſweet: while exceſs is in itſelf violent and tumultuous, haraſſes and exhauſts the ſpirits, baniſhes or diſturbs repoſe, brings on gloom and dejection, undermines, and ultimately deſtroys the ſtrongeſt frame,

All that remains, after due nouriſhment has been ſupplied, becomes the baneful

baneful ſeed of future diſeaſe; and if, through ſtrength of conſtitution, the day of ſuffering be deferred, it is deferred only to be more painful and grievous. How many ſpend an old age of anguiſh, or ſink to untimely graves, the victims of early and diſſolute exceſs!

There is no vice more deceitful and encroaching than intemperance. As the ſpirits muſt always be depreſſed in proportion to the degree to which they have been elevated above their natural pitch; ſo the mind, in this unhappy ſtate, will always be tempted to apply to its accuſtomed relief, and to drown its uneaſy ſenſations in larger draughts of the delicious poiſon; a poiſon which becomes more delicious, or rather more neceſſary, as it grows more fatal; till at laſt even this deſperate reſource will fail; or become at beſt but a temporary and precarious opiate.—Thus the intemperate man not only ſacrifices the rational pleaſures

ſures and honourable duties of life; but prepares for himſelf, the moſt lingering and painful of all deaths, without peace of conſcience or the hopes of religion to ſupport him in his laſt melancholy hour.

I might here dwell upon the miſchiefs which by intemperance men do to their families; the anguiſh which they bring upon their friends; the diſhonour which they reflect upon their religion, their Saviour, and their God—And ſhall the author of all theſe evils ſtill paſs for a harmleſs and even amiable character, who, though an enemy to himſelf, is a friend to all the world beſides? Alas! to himſelf he is an enemy indeed! aiming at no leſs than the deſtruction of his own body and ſoul. But he is alſo an enemy to ſociety at large; not only by conſuming what others want,—and thereby ſnatching, with mercileſs hand, from the poor, the ſick, the infirm, the aged, what might be a cordial to their drooping

ing ſpirits, and for which, perhaps, they are pining with thirſt and hunger;—not only by unfitting himſelf, during a conſiderable portion of his exiſtence, for the proper diſcharge of all ſocial duties—indeed for every rational and uſeful employ:—But beſides this, what outrages may not a man be led to commit, when the paſſions are fired, and reaſon is extinguiſhed! — outrages ſhocking to nature and humanity! At beſt, can he avoid both ſaying and doing numberleſs abſurd, imprudent, and ridiculous things, which wound the hearts of thoſe who love him, and gratify the malice of thoſe who hate him; which leſſen his character, while he is living; and will ſtain his memory after he is dead?

Meanwhile the ruin falls not upon himſelf alone, but upon numbers, who might have continued innocent, or at leaſt would have been leſs guilty, had they not been ſeduced by his example.

ample. But who can ſpeak the complicated guilt of that man "who know-"ing the judgment of God, that they "who commit ſuch things are worthy of "death, not only does the ſame, but has "pleaſure in thoſe that do them!" who, under the maſk of treacherous ſmiles, infuſes into his companion's heart the deadlieſt poiſon! who, not content with deſtroying his body—deſtroys his ſoul! —robs the parent of his fondly cheriſhed hopes—robs the world of an exemplary, uſeful life, and cuts off, in the very bloſſom of his days, a being, deſtined perhaps to ſhine on earth, and to flouriſh in immortal glory!

And what muſt be the reflections of him, who from every flattering proſpect, both for this world and the next, finds himſelf upon the brink of an untimely and a loathſome grave!—who with veins inflamed, and a diſordered imagination, looks forward to the fearful judgment of the great day, and—anticipating his eternal

eternal doom—loſes the ſenſe of mortal agonies—feels not the hand of death upon him, nor perceives the tears of parents, friends, and kindred, that ſtream around him!

And how bitter muſt thoſe tears be, which fall over the grave of intemperance! When we view the laſt remains of innocence and virtue, the ſigh of tender recollection is mingled with hope; and ſooths, while it ſaddens, the ſoul. But the pangs of an eternal and hopeleſs ſeparation, who can bear to think of!

And what hope, in the caſe before us, can the tendereſt and moſt partial friendſhip form? We are told by the Apoſtle Paul, that "they who do "ſuch things ſhall not inherit the "kingdom of God." "Know ye not "that ye are the temple of God, and "that your bodies are the temples of "the Holy Ghoſt? If any man defile "the temple of God, him ſhall God de-

"ſtroy

" ſtroy." And our Saviour himſelf gives us this ſolemn warning, " Take heed to " yourſelves, leſt at any time your hearts " be overcharged with ſurfeiting and " drunkenneſs, and cares of this life, " and ſo that day come upon you una- " wares." Nor can we be ſurprized at ſuch awful denunciations againſt this vice, when we conſider that it utterly deſtroys the ſerenity and ſtrength of the mind; and conſequently precludes that courſe of moral diſcipline, which is neceſſary to prepare us for the happineſs of a future ſtate. Such feveriſh agitations render men incapable of reflection, ſelf-examination, and all holy duties. Can they elevate their thoughts to the God of purity, in a becoming manner, who come into his preſence, with a mind oppreſſed and weighed down by intemperance? Their devotion is prophaneneſs; their praiſes blaſphemy; their prayers, abomination. And who can conceive, when the ſoul has been long

ſubjected

ſubjected to the body which it inhabits; when that body has fallen a ſacrifice to its brutal appetites; that ſuch a maſs of diſeaſe and wickedneſs ſhall riſe and ſhine among glorified ſpirits, and aſſume the robe of angelic purity, at the reſurrection of the juſt? No, it is a truth, not leſs certain than the exiſtence of heaven and hell, that "without holineſs "no man ſhall ſee the Lord," that none but "the pure in heart" ſhall be admitted to the bliſsful viſion of God.

What a gloom does this hang over many a feſtive and convivial ſcene! while thoſe that partake of it congratulate themſelves, as the only perſons who know how to enjoy life; perhaps, in the gaiety of their hearts, exult at the guilt which they incur, and ridicule unmercifully all whom they deſpair of corrupting. Yet how eaſy is the deſcent from virtue to vice! and by what unperceived gradations may the human heart be en-

ſnared, till thoſe crimes become inſeparable from it, which were once abhorrent to its nature! So that even St. Paul tells us of himſelf, notwithſtanding all the dignity of his apoſtolic character, that he "kept under his body, and "brought it into ſubjection; leſt that, "by any means, when he had preached "unto others, he himſelf ſhould be a "caſt-away."

At firſt, it is mere ſociability. It is pliableneſs of temper. It is cheerfulneſs and pleaſure, and happy oblivion of the cares of life. It is generous openneſs of heart: the impulſe of friendſhip and benevolence: glowing virtue: liberal manners: and allthat is amiable and pleaſing. But wait till habit has eſtabliſhed her dominion, and the illuſion ceaſes; it then appears in the form of diſeaſe, diſgrace, and miſery: broken ſpirits and ſhattered fortunes: clouded proſpects and ruined hopes: and ends in bitter repentance,

fruitleſs remorſe, and all that is to be dreaded both in this world and the next.

Am I now addreſſing any who are ſo unhappy, as to find themſelves engaged in this fatal courſe; moſt gladly would I wiſh not only to warn them of their danger, but to point out the moſt effectual remedies which can reſtore them to virtue and to peace.

Among thoſe who have been votaries of intemperance, ſome inſtances there are of men who, by a vigorous and determined reſolution, have at once thrown off both the ſociety, and the habits of the intemperate—for it is impoſſible to be diſengaged from the latter, without renouncing the former——and have become men of remarkable and exemplary ſobriety. There are alſo inſtances of others who, by means of the ſame ſteady purpoſe, have withdrawn

drawn by inſenſible degrees, and have in the end proved equally ſucceſsful.

In the firſt caſe the danger is, leſt the ſhock of ſo ſudden a change ſhould be too great both for the body and the mind; and leſt, unable to keep our reſolution in its full extent, we ſhould give up all thoughts of amendment in deſpair.

In the ſecond caſe, there is perhaps greater danger, leſt, complying with our ancient habits at all, we ſhould comply with them too far; and, venturing too boldly within the ſphere of temptation, ſhould forget the reſolutions we had formed of regaining our freedom. Let different diſpoſitions and circumſtances therefore determine which method we ought to purſue; but let us be ſincere, and let us be in earneſt. For it is an undertaking which requires all our fortitude and vigilance to accom-

pliſh; yet, if not accompliſhed, our ſalvation is an impoſſibility.

Habits of intemperance are perhaps, of all habits, the moſt difficult to conquer; becauſe they have produced a change in the body, as well as in the mind; and neither the one, nor the other, can bear to be deprived of that ſupport to which it has been long accuſtomed. In this ſtate the body languiſhes. The ſpirits are depreſſed. The imagination is overcaſt. Pain, languor, and uneaſineſs, ſucceed to vigorous enjoyment. And as few perſons have the fortitude to endure, for a long time, that uneaſineſs which it is in their power to remove; or to deny themſelves thoſe enjoyments, which are placed within their reach; ſo there are ſcarcely any inſtances of inveterate habits of intemperance having been thoroughly ſubdued: few having reſolution

lution enough even to make the attempt; and fewer ſtill to perſevere.

Whenever an event, ſo unlooked for, has happened, it has been almoſt always owing to ſome deep calamity, or ſome dangerous ſickneſs, which has placed the ſinner on the borders of the grave, or reduced him to the brink of deſpair; and which the providence of God—ever merciful in his judgments—has ſent for the deſtruction of the body, and the ſalvation of the ſoul; or, by eclipſing his moſt flattering worldly proſpects, to procure his everlaſting peace.

How deplorable is the fate of the intemperate! For even if they were ſure, by a timely repentance, of eſcaping the juſt judgment of God in another world, yet there are many dreadful evils, which they cannot eſcape in this.—If you have impaired your con-

ſtitution, that will not return. If you have neglected your worldly affairs, repentance will not retrieve them. If you have diſhonoured your name, your friends, or your family, your country or your religion, perpetrated any deed of horror, or even of great imprudence, and, much more, if you have betrayed others into guilt, this will be an everlaſting ſource of diſtreſs. The force of habit too is perpetually encreaſing; and retreat becomes every moment more difficult, as you decline farther from virtue.

I turn from hence, with pleaſure, to congratulate the man whoſe conſcience tells him that he is innocent; and who,—not in the confidence of ſuperior ſtrength, or with arrogant contempt of a fallen brother, but by the grace of God, which is never wanting to our humble endeavours and prayers, and which is able to abaſe the proud

proud and raiſe the fallen,—reſolves to keep himſelf innocent from this great evil.

While others around you are delivered up to their own ſordid appetites, to be tormented and deſtroyed; and thoſe, who eſcape this utmoſt ſeverity, eſcape with the ſhipwreck of all that renders life deſirable—you are enjoying that unclouded ſerenity, that unbroken vigour, and thoſe numberleſs happy fruits of innocence and moderation which not only brighten your days as they paſs, but illumine your proſpect into futurity.

Beware, then, of relaxing that vigilance by which, through the bleſſing of heaven, you have been hitherto preſerved. Tremble at whatever has the remoteſt tendency to weaken the empire of reaſon over your

paſſions; and be not too ſecure againſt thoſe lurking ſnares, which are ever ſpread for the unwary, whereby, in the midſt of unſuſpecting innocence, thouſands have been betrayed, and all their happineſs deſtroyed—beyond recovery.

SERMON

SERMON IX.

THE MUTUAL INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH AND MORAL VIRTUE.

John vii. 17. *If any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf.*

THAT our underſtanding, like all the other faculties of our nature, might have its due exerciſe in the purſuit of important truth—as our all-wiſe Creator has not impreſſed upon our minds even the knowledge of Himſelf by his immediate energy, but left us to inveſtigate the proofs of his Being and Perfections, by the uſe of our own rational powers;—ſo, with reſpect to the revelation of the Goſpel, he has not given to any

any an intuitive perception of its truth, but has prepared for the examination of all its proper evidence: which, though not indeed ſo ſtrong as to overbear the moſt obſtinate and inveterate prejudice, is yet ſufficient to afford reaſonable ſatiſfaction to the candid and impartial.

Hence the belief and reception of Chriſtianity are repreſented in the ſcriptures, as not only the means of future improvement in virtue, but as, in ſome meaſure, the criterion of a character already virtuous. "If any man will do "his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine "whether it be of God."—

Not that men are expected to have made ſuch advances in goodneſs, before they embrace Chriſtianity, as they may afterwards make by the help of its heavenly doctrines; for it is evidently the intention of the goſpel to give a perfection and a ſtability to virtue hitherto unknown.

unknown. But though virtue could neither riſe ſo high, nor ſtand ſo firm, without the aid of the goſpel; yet, before the exiſtence of Chriſtianity, mankind were equally under the moral government of God. In that period, the world was governed partly indeed, by occaſional revelations, or traditions of revelations; but, univerſally, by the light of reaſon and conſcience; and to counteract theſe principles was a crime then as well as now. Accordingly, we find the ſcriptures themſelves every where appealing to thoſe Original ſentiments and affections which are common to all ages and all nations, and for the moſt benevolent purpoſes were rendered inſeparable from the human frame.

Every man, therefore, who is born into the world, has a certain ſphere of duty, which, according to the manner in which it is filled up, will entitle him to proportionable reward or puniſhment

ment. Thoſe who have no written law "are a law unto themſelves." Even the nations which are comparatively overſpread with darkneſs, are under many and powerful obligations to the practice of moral virtue; how much more thoſe happier regions which are enlightened with the brighteſt rays of knowledge, and bleſſed with the moſt perfect civilization! Above all, wherever the glorious light of the goſpel is enjoyed, by means of which the meaneſt and moſt illiterate poſſeſs higher moral advantages than the greateſt philoſophers of former ages; and even they who embrace not revelation cannot help growing wiſer through its influence—all thoſe who are ſo favoured, cannot but feel themſelves under ſtronger obligations than the reſt of mankind, to the practice of univerſal goodneſs.

Moreover, not only are they bound to obey the common laws of temperance, charity,

charity, and piety, but alſo to cultivate the knowledge, and open their hearts to the impreſſion of the Chriſtian religion, if they be fully perſuaded of its truth; or, if any doubt hang upon their minds, to examine with due attention the value of its evidence.—To thoſe who act in this manner, conſcience bears witneſs that they are engaged in the noble cauſe of truth and virtue, and the ſcriptures promiſe that they ſhall undoubtedly be ſucceſsful. "If any man will do his will, "he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether "it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of "myſelf."

This aſſertion of our Saviour will, doubtleſs, be moſt perfectly underſtood by thoſe pious Chriſtians who perceive the mutual operation of their faith and virtue in ſtrengthening and improving each other;—who, with the growing influence of good affections in their hearts, experience a growing perſuaſion of the truth

truth of thoſe Chriſtian principles whence they flow.

But to all who reflect upon the conſtitution of human nature, and the genius of the goſpel, even though they have not yet been fully convinced from their own experience, of the truth of our Saviour's aſſertion in the text, it may perhaps be ſo explained, as to appear exceedingly probable, and agreeable to the natural courſe of things.

We ſhall therefore, in the ſequel of this diſcourſe, endeavour to ſhew that, if we conſider the text as a declaration of what would commonly happen in fact, it partakes of the nature of prophecy: or, if we conſider it merely as a general obſervation upon human characters, as they are more or leſs favourably diſpoſed for the reception of divine wiſdom, it is founded in truth and reaſon: or laſtly, if we conſider it as a promiſe made to

good

good men for their conſolation, it appears worthy of the appointment of God, and accords with the general plan of Providence.

Firſt, if we examine fact and experience, we ſhall, for the moſt part, find good men ranged on the ſide of Chriſtianity, and, generally ſpeaking, bad men on the ſide of infidelity. It is indeed unjuſt and illiberal, as well as highly unbecoming the diſciples of Jeſus, to pronounce ſuch harſh ſentences againſt all who differ from them in ſpeculation, however they may agree with them in practice, as will only tend the more to exaſperate them againſt the truth, and their own happineſs. If Chriſtianity has been calumniated by inſidious adverſaries, or diſguiſed by injudicious friends, God forbid that we ſhould involve, in one promiſcuous doom, the diſhoneſt heart, which ſeeks darkneſs as a ſhelter

for its crimes, and the deluded judgment, which has been the dupe of ſophiſtry. But while it becomes thoſe who receive Chriſt as their maſter, to be modeſt and temperate in their cenſures, it ſurely behoves thoſe who reject him, to examine their own hearts, and to be well ſatisfied that they are influenced by no motive but the pure and ſimple love of truth.

There may be examples of men who, in ſome meaſure, practiſe Chriſtianity without believing it; who conform, with conſiderable exactneſs, to its precepts, without being animated by its glorious hopes. Such characters are at once to be pitied and admired. But of this number you will find none loudly declaiming againſt religion, or inſidiouſly undermining the faith of others. That were not ſo much a want of religion, as of humanity.

If,

If, however, among thoſe who ſilently and reſpectfully withdraw from our aſſemblies, amiable and valuable qualities are found which plead powerfully in their behalf, and ſeem to forbid our tracing their unbelief—or rather their uncertainties and doubts—to any defect of the underſtanding or of the heart, beyond the common frailty of our nature; ſtill, it cannot be denied, that a very great part of avowed unbelievers have been men of vicious lives, who have encouraged themſelves and others in profligacy by ridiculing and reviling religion, and have diſcovered their enmity to virtue, by endeavouring to deſtroy the nobleſt bulwark of virtue that ever was erected among men.

Secondly, if we inquire into the cauſe of this general conſent of good men in favour of Chriſtianity, and enmity of bad

men againſt it, we ſhall ſoon perceive, from the nature of the thing, that this muſt neceſſarily be the caſe. For in the firſt place, good men are free from thoſe corrupt inclinations and licentious habits which cannot but ſtrongly incline the vicious to take refuge in infidelity. To the former, the religion of Chriſt has no terrors; but, on the contrary, abundant conſolations. They are its natural friends; wellwiſhers to its cauſe; and muſt be always diſpoſed to rejoice at its ſucceſs. Hence they examine its arguments with candour; they liſten to its doctrines with attention; their hearts are prepoſſeſſed in its behalf, and their underſtandings pronounce an equitable ſentence.

It cannot be denied, however, that an earneſt wiſh to be ſatisfied of the truth of Chriſtianity, ariſing from a conſciouſneſs

ſciouſneſs of being intereſted in its promiſes and bleſſings, though it may diſpoſe ſome minds to yield their aſſent to ſlighter evidence, does notwithſtanding upon others produce a quite contrary effect. It, no doubt, ſometimes renders men over ſcrupulous in their inquiries, unwilling to reſt in the ſtrongeſt probabilities, and content with nothing ſhort of demonſtration itſelf. And therefore it is probable that there are other cauſes which powerfully attach good men to the Chriſtian faith beſides the bias of favourable inclinations.

Of theſe cauſes one of the chief may be that good men feel moſt deeply the want of ſuch a revelation as the Chriſtian, and are moſt ſenſible of its ineſtimable value.—Let any man ſet himſelf to command his paſſions, to cultivate his moral principles, to conduct his life by the rules of wiſdom and virtue; let this be the grand object of his at-

tention, and let reaſon be his only guide —he will ſoon perceive that the blindneſs and feebleneſs of his nature are unequal to the ſtruggles of paſſion and appetite; unfit to grapple with ſtrong temptations; unable to afford any tolerable conſolation amidſt the emergencies of life; much more to diſpel the darkneſs which covers the valley of death. Hence he will be conſtrained to acknowledge the neceſſity of ſome ſuperior aid; and when he finds, that the doctrines of the goſpel not only confirm the dictates of reaſon, but inſtruct him where reaſon fails, and contain thoſe encouragements which are exactly accommodated to his wants and deſires—that the laws which it preſcribes ſo perfectly accord with the nobleſt affections of his nature, and the ſanctions by which theſe laws are ſupported are ſo admirably framed to promote the growth of virtue in his ſoul—in ſhort, that by this revelation, and by no other means, he

he can hope to attain that exalted character, that godlike temper of which he is naturally capable—can he doubt whether ſuch a religion as this ſprung out of the earth, or came down from heaven?

Another reaſon why good men are ſtrongly inclined to embrace the religion of the goſpel, is, that the integrity of their own hearts renders them not only more candid, but more competent judges of the integrity of Chriſt and the apoſtles. There is a certain ſympathy between the hearts of good men which eaſily diſcovers them to each other. When they converſe together, or read each other's writings, they obſerve their own feelings and ſentiments re-echoed. Thoſe very affections, which inſpired the boſom of the writer, are renewed in every congenial breaſt after ages have paſſed away.—Bad men are apt to ſuſpect all pretenſions to virtue of hypocriſy; or, if they are more credulous,

miſtake affectation for reality. The good alone can enter entirely into the ſpirit of each other's language and behaviour. Virtue is familiar to their minds; and they know, by a kind of inſtinctive perception, the genuine expreſſions of it. They have felt its influence themſelves, and they are ready to acknowledge, and able to diſtinguiſh, it in others.

What ſentiments then can ariſe, in ſuch minds, upon converſing with the ſacred writers ſo replete with native ſimplicity and unaffected piety—but thoſe of eſteem for their characters, and reſpect for their teſtimony?

Indeed, there are few ſo depraved as to be quite unimpreſſed by this argument — that a book, which was evidently written from no worldly motive, and with no other aim than to promote the glory of God and the ſalvation

vation of men, could never be the work of a viſionary enthuſiaſt or a mercenary impoſtor—to feel the force of this in ſome degree requires no uncommon elevation of character; but ſtill the more we improve in virtuous affections, the more ſhall we venerate and admire that religion which conſiſts in the exerciſe of them; the more ſhall we reſpect the virtues of its founders; and conſequently the more readily admit their teſtimony to a doctrine ſo congenial to all that is good and amiable in our nature.

Once more—good men are, above all others, favourably diſpoſed to the religion of the goſpel, becauſe they are moſt capable of diſcerning the genuine impreſs which it bears of the Divine character and perfections. In all our reaſonings about the nature of the Deity, we can never riſe above the idea of Human nature infinitely

exalted. Our own mind being the only mind in the univerſe which lies open to our inſpection, we naturally judge from our immediate feelings of what our fellow-creatures feel; from that part of mankind with which we are acquainted we draw our conception of the other part which lies out of ſight; from the general appearance of the world we live in, we form the only idea that we have of the whole creation; and thence we infer the complexion of the Divine mind. Now, as a gloomy, malevolent diſpoſition tinges every object with its own malignity, darkens the face of the world, and eclipſes the glory of the Divine perfections; ſo a prevailing goodneſs and generoſity of ſoul give to all nature the aſpect of benevolence, and inſpire the worthieſt ſentiments of its great Author. The mind, therefore, which is prepared, by conformity to the will of God, to admit juſt apprehenſions of his nature, as ſoon as it becomes intimately acquainted

quainted with that ſacred volume which is ſo replete with Divine Perfection, cannot avoid being ſtruck with the ſame features of Wiſdom and Goodneſs which are reflected from all parts of the Univerſe—will be led to bow with reverence as before the Oracle of God, and will adore him in theſe nobler manifeſtations of himſelf with proportionable gratitude and veneration.

From all theſe conſiderations, then, it appears that goodneſs of heart greatly conduces to ſoundneſs of underſtanding in religion; and that he who conſcientiouſly adheres to the practice of his duty, will ſeldom be permitted ſo groſsly to miſtake as to reject that "doctrine "according to godlineſs," which is the moſt valuable gift of God to man.

And we ſhall be confirmed in this opinion, as it will appear, laſtly, that this appointment is wiſe and right, and

and agreeable to the uſual proceedings of Providence. For, what reward can be more ſuitable, or more acceptable, to a good man than to be put in poſſeſſion of thoſe Divine truths which are the great ſupport of virtue in the human heart? or how could the Almighty give a more glorious proof of his approbation of goodneſs? To heap upon the virtuous temporal bleſſings, which might ſometimes rob them of that virtue which they were deſigned to reward, would be only an ambiguous proof of his favour. But to pour into their minds the light of heavenly truth, to diſcloſe that ſtupendous plan of moral government, which, having its foundation laid in the preſent ſtate, extends into future worlds—in fine, to manifeſt himſelf to them, transform them more and more into his likeneſs, and render them partakers of his glory—theſe are ſubſtantial bleſſings, worthy of the ever-bleſſed God to beſtow upon the children of his love,

love, and demanding from them returns of everlaſting gratitude.

It therefore appears to be, not without reaſon, a general law of Divine government, that, while Vice is ſuffered to operate to its own puniſhment, by locking the mind faſt in the dungeon of error and guilt, where the light of heaven cannot enter, and whence there is ſcarcely a poſſibility of eſcape; Virtue is, on the other hand, its own reward, by opening the mind to thoſe divine principles which confirm us in the poſſeſſion of it, and conſequently ſecure and perpetuate the peace and honour which it beſtows.

Moreover, as every acceſſion to the goodneſs of our characters has a tendency to eſtabliſh our Chriſtian faith, ſo every acceſſion to our faith cannot but ſhed the moſt kindly influence upon our virtue. The evidence of the Chriſtian religion

religion is therefore a growing evidence, as the Chriſtian life is a continued progreſs in holineſs; and as our hearts are ſoftened to admit good impreſſions of every kind, we become more capable at once of believing, admiring, and practiſing, its heavenly doctrines. What follows, but that, when a man has employed his underſtanding in the ſearch of religious truths, has embraced them upon rational conviction, has formed his temper by their influence, has conſcientiouſly diſcharged the obligations thence ariſing, and perſevered through the conflict of temptations,—his faith muſt neceſſarily ſtrike ſuch a deep and vigorous root as to give a tranquillity to his mind, and a firmneſs to his virtue, which cannot be ſhaken?

To all, therefore, who have in any degree felt the ſatisfaction which attends the life of a Chriſtian, or hope ever to enjoy

enjoy it—to all who emulate the dignity and excellence of that bleſſed character, or aſpire to its great rewards—to every ſerious inquirer after truth, who is in queſt of ſolid and laſting happineſs, who wiſhes to act nobly, and, above all things, to approve himſelf to God, to good men, and to his own impartial conſcience—this remarkable promiſe of our Saviour in the text will be moſt welcome. For, on this important ſubject, to have every ſuſpicion baniſhed, every doubt reſolved, muſt be the ſtrongeſt wiſh of every good mind. There is no happineſs which ſuch a mind wiſhes to enjoy on earth, which the doctrine of our Saviour does not heighten; beſides enriching us with the glorious reverſion of a bleſſed immortality.

How thankful then ſhould we be for that various information, and that deciſive evidence, which it hath pleaſed the Divine Providence to offer us, on this moſt intereſting ſubject!—A ſubject

on

on account of which antiquity has been ranſacked; which has been agitated from age to age by men of profound learning and ability; which has called forth all their powers; and yet requires, chiefly, the application of an honeſt and humble mind!

Here I might refer to many works of high merit, where the authenticity of the ſacred records, as well as the integrity and competency of their authors, are diſplayed at large. And moſt heartily were it to be wiſhed that no one would imagine himſelf at liberty to ſpeak or think of ſo virtuous a religion with diſreſpect, till, out of tenderneſs for the deareſt intereſts of mankind, he had made ſome inquiry into its grounds. But, if this be too much, at leaſt conſider what that is, which you raſhly reject;—read the ſcriptures themſelves—they reſt on their own baſis—and then ſay, whether you can even in thought picture to yourſelf any thing

more

more worthy of God, or more conducive to the happineſs of man. That voice of truth, that air of ſimplicity, that ſpirit of benevolence and genuine piety, which characterize them, are more convincing than a thouſand ſpeculative arguments. It is impoſſible (you will be conſtrained to admit) that ſuch ſentiments could flow but from good and honeſt hearts. Doubt not therefore, my Chriſtian friends, the Religion of the Scriptures ſhall endure to the end of the world. For who will ſay, that God has exerted ſo little wiſdom in the formation of man, or exerciſes ſo little providence over human affairs, that the principles of Probity, Benevolence, and Piety, ſhall ever entirely fail; and while theſe exiſt, the cauſe of genuine Chriſtianity muſt endure.

To conclude: as it is Virtue which, by prompting diligent inquiry, and opening the mind to rational conviction, lays the foundation of the Chriſtian character;

character; ſo it is virtue alone which can raiſe that glorious ſuperſtructure, without which our inquiries are fruitleſs, and our conviction will be of no avail.

In vain would the meagre form of ſpeculative infidelity weave around us the web of deluſion, if the world had not chains that were harder to be broken. But how can ye believe, as our Saviour obſerves, who "ſeek honour one of ano-"ther, and not the honour which cometh "from God only?" How can ye believe (we may add) who are loſt in diſſipation, or enſlaved by worldly intereſt? who give the reins to your paſſions? who are immerſed in ſenſe? who look upon a life of reaſon and virtue as a life of inſipidity, and have in a great meaſure excluded God and your duty from your thoughts?

But were it poſſible for us, while continuing in our ſins, to riſe to the utmoſt

clearneſs and ardour of conviction—ſuch conviction, without holineſs and charity, would not only prove unprofitable, but add to our condemnation. In vain at the great and awful day of univerſal retribution ſhall we addreſs the Judge of the world in ſuch language as this—Lord, have we not with all confidence relied upon thy great name? Have we not laboured with ſucceſs to ſpread thy empire over the minds of others? Have we not uttered oracles of wiſdom, and wrought prodigies of power? —For if our conduct have not accorded with our faith, "I know you not, depart "from me, ye that work iniquity," will be our dreadful doom from the lips of mercy and compaſſion itſelf. And many a profeſſor of Chriſtianity, who has diſhonoured his maſter, will certainly meet with far deeper contempt, and a heavier ſentence, than thoſe who have caſt off the profeſſion of religion

altogether, but whoſe lives have been worthy of better principles—for "many "that are firſt ſhall be laſt, and the "laſt firſt."

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

OUR SAVIOUR'S PROPHECY OF THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.

Mat. xxiii. 36. *Verily I ſay unto you all theſe things ſhall come upon this generation.*

How preciſe and peremptory are the denunciations in this and the following chapter; and how clearly do they demonſtrate our bleſſed Saviour's Prophetic ſpirit! There is not a circumſtance of the dreadful calamities impending over the Jewiſh ſtate which he did not diſtinctly foretel; and we have undeniable evidence that every circumſtance foretold was afterwards verified by fact. Nothing can be more expreſs or full than the prediction; nothing more punctual than

the accompliſhment. Certainly this challenges our moſt ſerious attention, as a powerful and ſtriking argument for the Truth and Divinity of the Chriſtian religion.

Though there are, throughout the ſcriptures, frequent alluſions to the final Cataſtrophe of the Jewiſh ſtate, yet the moſt expreſs predictions of it are recorded in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, the thirteenth of Mark, and the twenty-firſt of Luke. Inſtead of reciting the whole, we ſhall ſelect ſome of the principal parts; and, as we proceed, ſhew the literal and punctual accompliſhment of them. With this view, we ſhall have recourſe, chiefly, to the Jewiſh hiſtorian, Joſephus: the Divine Providence having wiſely appointed, that the hiſtory of theſe important tranſactions ſhould be written not by a Chriſtian, but by a Jew; that, coming from the hand of an enemy, it might bid defiance to ſuſpicion.

The

The Evangeliſts inform us, that Jeſus ſtanding near the temple in the midſt of his diſciples, ſaid unto them, "See "ye not all theſe things? Verily, I ſay "unto you, there ſhall not be left here "one ſtone upon another that ſhall not "be thrown down.*"

Accordingly Joſephus relates, that though the temple was a building of ſuch ſtrength and grandeur, that the Roman general wiſhed to preſerve it as a monument of his own victory, and of the glory of the empire; yet the ſoldiers, not only without orders, but in oppoſition to entreaties and menaces, ſet fire to the building; "and thus," ſays he, "the "temple was deſtroyed againſt the will of "Cæſar." The city ſhared the ſame fate. Three towers only, and ſome part of the wall, were left ſtanding. The reſt was ſo entirely levelled with the ground that

* Matt. xxiv. 2.

ſtrangers, who afterwards came to ſee it could ſcarcely believe that ever it had been inhabited.

Again, the Evangeliſts tell us, that the diſciples, upon hearing this remarkable prediction, as ſoon as they had an opportunity of converſing with their maſter privately upon the ſubject, came to him and aſked him, "When ſhall "theſe things be?"* Jeſus anſwered, that it would come to paſs that there ſhould ariſe falſe Chriſts and falſe prophets, who ſhould deceive many: that there ſhould be famines and earthquakes and peſtilences; that they ſhould hear of wars and rumours of wars, and that all theſe things ſhould be only the beginning of ſorrows. — With reſpect to themſelves, he likewiſe forewarned them, that, while theſe awful ſcenes were acting, they ſhould be per-

* Matt. xxiv. 3.

ſecuted

ſecuted, impriſoned, and put to death; that many of them would renounce their religion, betray one another, and hate one another; and that they ſhould be hated of all men, for his name's ſake—but that notwithſtanding theſe diſcouragements, the goſpel ſhould ſtill prevail; that the ſufferings of its profeſſors ſhould turn for a teſtimony in its favour; that it ſhould be preached throughout all nations, and then "ſhould the end "come," that is, the final overthrow of the Jewiſh ſtate.

Here let us ſtop to obſerve the exact accompliſhment of the foregoing predictions. Firſt, with reſpect to falſe Chriſts: many of theſe are particularly mentioned by Joſephus; who ſays, they perſuaded the people to follow them into the wilderneſs, aſſuring them that they ſhould there receive ſigns of deliverance: and probably it was the expectation, then generally prevailing, of a temporal deliverer, which induced ſuch a

multitude of impoſtors to aſſume that character.

To ſhew that there were perpetual wars and commotions in thoſe times, would be to tranſcribe a great part of the hiſtory of the age, and particularly Joſephus's hiſtory of the wars of the Jews.

With reſpect to famines, earthquakes, peſtilences, and prodigies, we have the teſtimony of two celebrated heathen hiſtorians,* as well as that of the Jewiſh hiſtorian. And theſe, as will abundantly appear from the ſequel, were only "the "beginning of ſorrows."

With reſpect to what the Chriſtians ſuffered from the treachery and apoſtacy of falſe brethren, and from the contempt and hatred both of Jews and Heathens, this appears from the

* Tacitus and Suetonius.

goſpels,

goſpels, the acts, and all the apoſtolic writings. Tacitus alſo bears witneſs not only to the falſe accuſations and unjuſt perſecutions to which they were expoſed under Nero, but to the general odium which fell upon them.

With reſpect to the extenſive ſpread of the goſpel, we may be convinced of this, not only from the acts of the apoſtles, but from the epiſtles of Paul and Peter to churches eſtabliſhed in various diſtant parts of the world: — thoſe very perſecutions which ſcattered the Chriſtians, having accelerated the progreſs of Chriſtianity from one end of the earth to the other.

If we now turn back to the evangeliſts, they inform us, that our Saviour, having pointed out theſe remoter ſigns of the calamities of the Jewiſh nation, declares expreſsly the principal circumſtances that ſhould accompany them, " And

" when,"

" when," continues he, " ye ſhall be-
" hold the abomination of deſolation,
" ſpoken of by Daniel the prophet,
" ſtanding in the holy place;" or, ac-
cording to Luke, " When ye ſhall ſee
" Jeruſalem encompaſſed with armies;"
that is, when the ſtandards of the Ro-
man legions which bore the deteſtable
images of their idols are planted on
holy ground, " then know that the
" deſolation thereof draweth nigh."
This was a ſignal for the diſciples to
depart. For the Roman general, after
ſeveral unſucceſsful aſſaults, having con-
ſulted with his officers, it was deter-
mined to encompaſs the city with a
wall, which, together with towers at
proper diſtances, by the incredible dili-
gence of the ſoldiers, was completed in
three days, and cut off all poſſibility of
retreat. To this our Saviour probably
alludes in theſe remarkable words re-
corded by Luke, " For the days will
" come upon thee that thine enemies

" ſhall

" ſhall caſt a trench about thee, and " compaſs thee round, and keep thee in " on every ſide." Luke xix. 43.

Our Lord proceeds, " For in thoſe " days there ſhall be great tribulation " and wrath upon this people, ſuch as " was not from the beginning of the " creation, which God created, unto " this time, no nor ever ſhall be. And " they ſhall fall by the edge of the " ſword, and ſhall be led captive into " all nations: and Jeruſalem ſhall be " trodden down of the Gentiles, until " the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." This too was punctually and awfully accompliſhed; as appears from the account which the Jewiſh hiſtorian gives us of the rapines, murders, and famine, which conſumed them within the city, while fire and ſword were deſtroying them without; inſomuch that the number of thoſe who periſhed in the ſiege alone is computed to be eleven hundred thouſand.

thouſand. But perhaps upon this point it will be ſufficient to recite two paſſages from Joſephus: the firſt is in his preface. "Our city," ſays he, "of all thoſe which have been ſubjected "to the Romans, was raiſed to the "higheſt felicity, and was thruſt down "again into the deepeſt miſery. For if "the calamities of all nations from "the beginning of the world were to "be compared with thoſe of the Jews, "they would appear much lighter upon "the compariſon." And again elſewhere, "to ſpeak in brief, no other "city ever ſuffered ſuch things, as no "other from the beginning of the "world was more fruitful in wickedneſs."

With reſpect to the remaining parts of the prediction; that the Jews ſhould be diſperſed among all nations, and that Jeruſalem ſhould be trodden down of the Gentiles: theſe we behold with our own

own eyes aſtoniſhingly fulfilled. Jeruſalem is now trodden down of the Gentiles. The Jews are, at this day, ſcattered throughout all lands; and therefore room is ſtill left for their reſtoration, when the times of the Gentiles ſhall be fulfilled; or, as the apoſtle Paul expreſſes it, "when the fulneſs of "the Gentiles ſhall come in, and ſo all "Iſrael ſhall be ſaved." Rom. xi.

Our Saviour concludes, "Verily, I "ſay unto you, this generation ſhall "not paſs away, till all be fulfilled." And it is well known, that the deſtruction of Jeruſalem was accompliſhed, A. D. 70, about forty years after the death of Chriſt.

When we take an impartial ſurvey of all the particular circumſtances, which our Saviour foretels, reſpecting the overthrow of the Jewiſh ſtate,—when we conſider that his predictions are no ambiguous oracles,

oracles, contain no general and vague deſcription, no obſcure language, which may be applied to almoſt any event, and admits of a thouſand artful explanations —but preſent us with the moſt perſpicuous, accurate, and even pictureſque delineation of ſcenes which were afterwards diſplayed before the eyes of innumerable multitudes, at the very period which he had likewiſe diſtinctly ſpecified—what concluſion can we draw?

For, certainly, our Saviour was no confederate with the Romans who put him to death: nor, during the age in which he lived, could they themſelves form the leaſt conception of a cataſtrophe, which was at laſt accompliſhed contrary to all their wiſhes, cuſtoms, and policies. We know that man is a ſhort-ſighted creature: futurity to him is a region of darkneſs: he can boaſt no proud diſcoveries of the great revolutions of ſtates and empires in ages to come: the

the very events of his own life he is ignorant of, till they actually riſe to his view; and each ſucceſſive ſcene leaves him a ſtranger to what will immediately follow. If then there were but a ſingle inſtance of that myſterious veil which is thrown over things to come, being withdrawn, and the ſecrets of remote futurity brought into preſent obſervation; exhibited with ſuch variety of circumſtances, as are wholly inapplicable to every other event, while they all concenter in the event to which they are applied; inſomuch that the whole was evidently painted upon the imagination of the prophet, in the ſame diſtinct and lively colours, in which it afterwards paſſed before the eye of the ſpectator; and the hiſtorian himſelf can add nothing to the fulneſs of the original deſcription; the event too, altogether unexpected in its approach, and unlikely to happen, till its actual arrival; yet brought forth in its due ſeaſon, to the full

full view of the wondering world—if there were but a ſingle inſtance of ſuch an indubitable prediction; as it evidently tranſcends the natural ſagacity of man, it muſt be acknowledged to flow from the Omniſcience of God!

And although, when it has pleaſed the Almighty to favour us with ſuch abundant variety of evidence, one would not reſt a cauſe of ſuch importance as that of Chriſtianity upon any one argument; yet I cannot conclude without recommending that, which has been the ſubject of this diſcourſe, to particular notice—both as it preſents us with one of the moſt circumſtantial predictions in ſcripture of one of the moſt awful events in hiſtory; and as it is conjoined by the evangeliſts in ſo affecting a manner with more awful ſcenes which are yet to come.

SERMON XI.

OUR SAVIOUR'S PROPHECY OF THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.

Matt. xxiii. 36. *Verily I ſay unto you, all theſe things ſhall come upon this generation.*

IT is ſcarcely poſſible for the hiſtory of any paſt event to be more exact and circumſtantial than our Saviour's prophecy of the miſeries impending over the Jewiſh ſtate: of which we may be ſatisfied from the account given of this prophecy by any of the three firſt Evangeliſts; contraſted with its accompliſhment, as recorded by the Jewiſh hiſtorian Joſephus.

There is only one way of evading the force of this argument for our

Saviour's divine miſſion: that is; by ſuppoſing, without any ground for ſuch ſuppoſition, that the deſtruction of Jeruſalem was already accompliſhed, before it is ſaid to have been foretold; and conſequently, that the pretended prophecy is merely an hiſtorical record in a prophetic form. We ſhall therefore, in the preſent diſcourſe, endeavour to prove that the prophecy in queſtion is not fictitious, but real; that it was actually delivered by our Saviour himſelf, and publiſhed by his diſciples before the event.

Of this we have ſome evidence from the teſtimony of early writers: the ſubſtance of which is, that Peter and Paul ſuffered martyrdom under Nero's perſecution, a whole year before the commencement of the Jewiſh war; that Matthew wrote his goſpel firſt, and that Mark and Luke, who followed him, wrote their goſpels about the time of the deaths

of

of Peter and Paul; with a view to record the diſcourſes of thoſe apoſtles, for the benefit, and at the deſire, of their former hearers. Conſidering therefore the time when, and the occaſion upon which, they wrote; it cannot be conceived that they would venture to inſert any new matter before thoſe who had actually heard the apoſtles themſelves, who are proved to have been dead, not only antecedent to the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, but even to the commencement of the Jewiſh war.

But, as the diſtinct inveſtigation of theſe particulars would lead us into a detail too intricate and tedious for a diſcourſe of this nature; let it ſuffice at preſent, that the prophecies themſelves, and the manner in which they are delivered, afford abundant evidence of their authenticity and truth.

Firſt then, it is not eaſy to conceive, what advantage the evangeliſts could expect, from publiſhing predictions which no one had ever heard of before, when the event was already paſt. It is plain, that ſuch predictions could not gain credit, except with thoſe who were Chriſtians already, and therefore ſtood in need of no ſuch artifice to convert them. And if the point aimed at was merely to confirm the faith of thoſe already converted; as theſe predictions muſt rather reſt upon the authority of the apoſtles than their authority upon the predictions, why ſhould ſo much ſtreſs be laid upon them? Why ſhould they be ſo conſtantly repeated and alluded to, and in a manner incorporated into the whole ſubſtance of the evangelical writings?

This circumſtance, I mean the continual repetition of theſe predictions in ſuch various forms, and upon ſuch various occaſions, is ſufficient to prove that they

they could not be inſerted, fraudulently, after the publication of the goſpels, in which they are contained.—If indeed there were one ſhort paſſage only, of one ſingle evangeliſt, quite unconnected with every thing before and after, which mentioned theſe predictions, this paſſage might with more ſhew of reaſon be ſuſpected; and if not genuine, would probably carry marks of fraud upon the face of it. But when three evangeliſts unite in relating the prophecy, giving us the ſubſtance of ſeveral converſations about it, and recurring to the ſame ſubject again and again, this is ſufficient to convince us that at what time ſoever the writings of the evangeliſts were publiſhed, our Saviour's predictions of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem were undoubtedly contained in them.

It being allowed then that the predictions are at leaſt as old as the books in which they are recorded, when we

come to examine both, we find not the leaſt circumſt ce which can lead us to ſuſpect that at the time of the books being publiſhed the predictions were fulfilled. No artful apology is made for publiſhing the firſt account of them, after the event; no ſolemn proteſtation that they had been actually received before it; no affected triumph in its arrival; not the leaſt anticipation of objections. On the contrary, the dreadful cataſtrophe is throughout repreſented as yet future; and the moſt urgent and ſolemn warnings are given to fly from impending ruin. This is the caſe with the three firſt evangeliſts, who are ſaid to have written before (and who ſcarcely ſurvived) the overthrow of their nation. And John, who wrote afterwards, and chiefly to ſupply their defects, takes notice neither of the prediction, nor of the event.

Moreover,

Moreover, to theſe warnings the Chriſtians were certainly indebted for their preſervation. For that, before the commencement of the ſiege, they left Jeruſalem, and went to a place beyond Jordan called Pella, Euſebius expreſsly informs us; who, as he reſided near that place, had doubtleſs received ſatisfactory information from their deſcendants.

From the foregoing obſervations it may be fairly concluded, that theſe predictions, long before the period of their accompliſhment, were well known to the general body of the diſciples.

Many ſtriking circumſtances may alſo be adduced to prove, that theſe predictions fell from our Saviour's own lips; and if the predictions were his, it will be denied by none, that he had been crucified forty years before they were fulfilled.

First then, the Style and Manner of theſe predictions are every where our Saviour's own. Like other important diſcourſes on ſubjects perfectly familiar, and perpetually recurring, to his mind, they are introduced in the caſual flow of converſation without any laboured preface. Thus, while his diſciples were admiring and pointing out the ſtrength and beauty of the temple, how natural was it for him to advert to the near approach of that dreadful ruin, which was to ſhake this glorious edifice from its foundation! When afterwards, about to make his triumphant entry into Jeruſalem, he came within ſight of the city, the ſame awful ſcene again roſe before his mind, and he diſcovered the ſtrength both of his foreknowledge and of his humanity, by tears and expreſſions full of tenderneſs. This is a circumſtance peculiarly characteriſtic. We find alſo this memorable event delineated in a variety of parables, the uſe

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of which was one of our Saviour's greateſt peculiarities, and which do not appear to have been ever adopted by the apoſtles, as a vehicle of inſtruction. Perhaps, indeed, one important advantage of this figurative language might be to diſtinguiſh our Saviour's expreſs words from their comments.

Thus the parable of the houſeholder that planted a vineyard, and let it out to huſbandmen, who beat his ſervants, and at laſt killed his ſon, and who, by the confeſſion of the Phariſees themſelves, deſerved to be miſerably deſtroyed;—that of the marriage of the king's ſon, which thoſe who were bidden made light of, and ſlew the king's ſervants, and provoked him to ſend forth his armies, and burn up their city;—that of the barren fig-tree;—the great man's ſupper;—the man who went to receive a kingdom, and commanded the citizens that rejected him to be ſlain;—beſides

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ſeveral others—appear to be directly levelled at this point. And this figurative ſtyle very ſtrongly marks the prediction as our Saviour's.

We have already noticed, and it was impoſſible not to glance upon, the Tenderneſs and Humanity conſpicuous in the delivery of theſe predictions. But this deſerves a more diſtinct conſideration. The Saviour of men does not exult in the perfect foreſight which he had of the ruin of his enemies. On the contrary, he diſcovers the marks of great and unaffected compaſſion. And we find him particularly touched with the diſtreſſes of thoſe who are moſt helpleſs—ſuch as women with infants at their breaſts. Not to repeat, how he wept at the ſight of the city, amidſt the Hoſannahs of the rejoicing multitudes; immediately after he had been inveighing with warmth againſt the wickedneſs and hypocriſy of the Scribes

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and Phariſees, and denouncing upon that generation the juſt judgments of God,—what tenderneſs fills his heart when he adverts to their dreadful ſufferings; and how does the indignation which it was natural for a mind of ſuch purity to conceive, loſe itſelf in theſe affectionate words! "O Jeruſalem, "Jeruſalem, thou that killeſt the pro-"phets, and ſtoneſt them that are ſent "unto thee; how often would I have "gathered thy children together, even "as a hen gathereth her brood under "her wings, and ye would not: behold, "your houſe is left unto you deſolate!" And again, juſt before his crucifixion, when he beheld a train of women following, with tears and lamentations, "Daugh-"ters of Jeruſalem, weep not for me, "but for yourſelves, and for your chil-"dren." How ſtrongly do we here diſtinguiſh the mild features of our Saviour himſelf from thoſe of the diſciples, who would have called down fire from hea-

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ven upon the inhoſpitable Samaritans; from Eccleſiaſtical hiſtorians, who have noticed the impieties and miſeries of the Jews with greater appearance of triumph than of humanity; and indeed from too many Chriſtians in every age! But, though the crimes of the Jews were now recent, they are treated, in theſe predictions, with clemency and compaſſion. This ſhews the predictions to have flowed from one of the greateſt as well as beſt of minds, and marks them as our Saviour's own.

Laſtly, in the account which the Evangeliſts have given us of theſe prophecies, the Deſtruction of Jeruſalem is ſo mixed with the awful ſcenes of the Laſt Day, that both events ſeem to be confounded in the imagination of the writers;—a circumſtance which could not poſſibly have happened after one of the events had actually taken place.

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That both events are ſpoken of is evident, from ſome ſtriking diſtinctions made between them.

Thus it is ſaid, "This generation "ſhall not paſs, till all theſe things are "fulfilled," which doubtleſs muſt be underſtood of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem. — "But of that day and hour "knoweth no man; no, not the angels "of God, not even the Son, but my "Father only." This muſt be the great deciſive day of judgment.

But to which of theſe periods are we to refer what follows?

"Then ſhall two be in the field, the "one ſhall be taken, and the other left. "Two women ſhall be grinding at the "mill, the one ſhall be taken, and the "other left."—Probably this is to be referred to the laſt day, which, unlike the great cataſtrophes of the world at preſent,

preſent, ſhall bring with it the moſt accurate diſcrimination of characters; while our reſpective ſituations and connexions in ſociety, which determine our fate with reſpect to temporal proſperity and adverſity, ſhall not, in the leaſt, affect our acceptance or non-acceptance at that day. Though in the ſame field, or at the ſame mill, "the one ſhall be "taken, and the other left."

Accordingly, by Matthew, this paſſage is placed, not in the former part of the chapter which relates to that preſent generation; but in the latter, which relates to the great day, which is known to the Father of the univerſe only.

On the other hand, by Luke the ſame paſſage ſeems to be referred to the period when the Jews ſhould fall into the hands of their enemies: who are aptly compared to birds of prey hovering round a carcaſe

carcaſe: which compariſon evidently appears to have this reference, as it is alſo applied by another evangeliſt to the events which would come to paſs in that generation *.

Again—"when" ſays Matthew, "ye "ſhall ſee the abomination of deſola-"tion—" (which is thus explained by Luke, "when ye ſhall ſee Jeruſalem "encompaſſed with armies")—"then "let them which be in Judea, flee into "the mountains. Let him which is on "the houſe-top not come down, to take "any thing out of his houſe: neither "let him which is in the field, return "back to take his clothes." This, and what follows both in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew and the correſpondent paſſage of Luke, evidently relate to the dreadful ruin impending over the Jews; and the neceſſity of fly-

* Luke xvii. 37. Matt. xxiv. 28, 34.

ing, with the utmoſt precipitation upon the firſt appearance of the Roman ſtandards.

But in the ſeventeenth chapter of Luke, we find almoſt the ſame expreſſions applied, not to the period in which Jeruſalem ſhould be deſtroyed, but to the day in which the Son of man ſhall be revealed. And that by this revelation of the Son of man, we are to underſtand the period of his coming to judge the world, appears from its being introduced in the ſame manner, and illuſtrated by the ſame compariſons, that are uſed by Matthew, when ſpeaking of the day which no man knoweth, but which is known to God only *.

From theſe differences among the evangeliſts, it is evident that they ſpoke

* Compare Luke xvii. 24—31. with Matthew xxiv. 36—39.

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of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem and of the end of the world promiſcuouſly; and, conſequently, that they conſidered theſe two periods as one and the ſame. But this will appear in a ſtill ſtronger light, from one part of our Saviour's diſcourſe, in which they all agree.

" Immediately" ſays Matthew " after " the tribulation of thoſe days—ſhall " they ſee the Son of man coming in " the clouds of heaven with power, " and great glory. And he ſhall ſend " forth his angels with a great ſound of " trumpet, and they ſhall gather toge- " ther his elect from the four winds, " from one end of heaven to the " other," — expreſſions perfectly correſponding to thoſe uſed in the next chapter, where there can be no doubt that it is the day of judgment which is ſpoken of——" when the Son of " man ſhall come in his glory, and all " his holy angels with him, then ſhall

"he ſit upon the throne of his glory, "and before him ſhall be gathered "all nations *."—But when we imagine that we have been hearing of the laſt grand cataſtrophe of nature, it is added, "Verily I ſay unto you, this generation "ſhall not paſs, till all theſe things be "fulfilled."

In the ſame manner, Mark and Luke, while evidently diſcourſing of the calamities of the Jews, ſeem to riſe, by a ſudden tranſition, from the period of the Jewiſh ſtate to that of the world itſelf, and deſcribe the coming of our Saviour in terms nearly ſimilar and equally ſublime; yet all with one conſent refer the whole to that preſent generation.

What then can we infer from ſuch lofty deſcriptions, conſiſting of images,

* Matt. xxv. 31, 32.

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ſo applicable to the general judgment of the world; which are notwithſtanding, limited to that preſent generation, and conſequently incapable of repreſenting any thing beyond the period of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem; but that the writers had aſſociated both ideas together in their own imagination. This may be eaſily accounted for, from the pre-conceived opinion of the diſciples that ſo noble a building as the Temple could not be deſtroyed before the final diſſolution of all things. And we are aſſured that this opinion had taken poſſeſſion of their minds by the queſtion which they aſk — "Tell us "what ſhall be the ſign of theſe things, "of thy coming, and of the end of the "world?" concluding that theſe events would all happen together.

But whatever was the cauſe of the confuſion which runs through theſe chapters, and the ambiguity ſo obſervable

between the prediction of the laſt day, and of the deſtruction of Jeruſalem; nothing can be more evident than that after the deſtruction of Jeruſalem was accompliſhed, predictions confounding that event with the final period of the world would never have been written.

In ſhort, the account of the evangeliſts has all the appearance of an imperfect copy from a perfect original. And from hearing a diſcourſe, clear, doubtleſs, in itſelf, and accurately diſtinguiſhing between the two great events, they have preſented us with fragments evidently miſplaced, but which as evidently refer to each other, whence by a more apt arrangement we can form a perfect whole. What they relate, therefore, was not their own invention, becauſe it does not appear to have been perfectly comprehended by them. It comes from a SuperiorSource, and bears upon the face of it the moſt ſtriking marks of our bleſſed

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Saviour himſelf: as it is quite in his own acknowledged manner, to lead the thoughts of his diſciples from temporal to eternal things; and therefore from the tragical events which he had juſt foretold, he naturally introduces that more grand and important period, which was equally familiar and preſent to his mind, and which it was the great deſign of his miſſion to announce to the world. Accordingly, the cloſe of every chapter, wherein theſe predictions are contained, is filled with ſerious exhortations to prepare for this period, by all the three evangeliſts; and by Matthew particularly, the whole of the chapter immediately following is employed in deſcribing it at large.

The beſt improvement we can make of the foregoing diſcourſe will be to turn our thoughts upon the Unerring counſels of the Ruler of the univerſe; the irreſiſtible force by which he bends

the moſt rebellious ſubjects to his will; the teſtimony which he has compelled avowed enemies to give to the goſpel; the awful judgments that have been poured out upon thoſe who dared to riſe up againſt it: and above all, the vaſt Eternity which it opens to our view.

As an argument for our Saviour's Divine Miſſion, the Prophecy which we have been conſidering muſt appear to have great weight. But let us remember, that it is only One argument of many; which viewed in connection acquire new ſtrength from their relation to each other, and eſpecially to the Great and Benevolent Plan which they concur to ſupport.

Penetrated with theſe ſolemn atteſtations given by Earth and by Heaven to our bleſſed Saviour's divine authority, let us reflect, that he who foretold the day when Jeruſalem

Jeruſalem ſhould be reduced to aſhes, has likewiſe forwarned us, that this world which we inhabit ſhall be diſſolved; that earth and ſea ſhall give up their dead; and that all who are in their graves ſhall ariſe, and come forth to judgment!

The former of theſe predictions has been accompliſhed to the full; and therefore deſerves to be conſidered as an awful prelude, as well as convincing evidence, of the latter.

There is, then, a period fixed by the counſels of heaven, and marked out in the ages to come, when Impenitence ſhall no longer exult in impunity, nor Virtue go without her reward.

Should not this excite us to aſk ourſelves often and ſeriouſly, as we glide through the ſucceſſive ſtages of the hu-

man courſe—Whither do the wheels of time bear us ſo rapidly along?

Shortly, this career muſt ceaſe; the world will vaniſh like a ſhadow; and whether we are prepared or not, Death, Judgment, and Eternity, in dread ſucceſſion, become preſent——Eternity, which, like an unfathomable ocean, ſhall abſorb all traces of mortal things, except the everlaſting remembrance of virtue!

"Watch, therefore, for ye know "neither the day, nor the hour, when "your Lord cometh."

SERMON

SERMON XII.

YOUNG PERSONS REMINDED OF THEIR MORTALITY.

Pſalm ciii. 15. *As for man his days are as graſs; as a flower of the field, ſo he flouriſheth—*

MOURNFUL indeed, yet extremely ſalutary, is the reflection upon the mortality of man. It chills every vicious propenſity, inſpires the mind with ſober and ſerious thought, and fits it for every virtuous exertion.

But, alas, how tranſient is the impreſſion which it makes! We hear the death-bell toll—ſee "the mourners go about the "ſtreets"—it may be, mix in the ſad train—give a ſigh to human vanity, or ſhed a tear as we bend over the grave—then re-

join the unthinking multitude, reſume our warm deſires and eager purſuits of earthly felicity, and utterly forget that—ere long—the death-bell ſhall toll for us; the ſame mournful ſolemnities be repeated over our own remains; and that while, among careleſs gazers and weeping friends, our bodies are depoſited in the duſt—our ſouls muſt return to God, and await their final doom from his irreverſible ſentence.

This is, no doubt, a ſubject of univerſal concern! But it is chiefly to the Young that the preſent diſcourſe is intended to be addreſſed, though they may perhaps imagine themſelves to be leaſt of all intereſted—for Youth is apt to conſider Death as at a diſtance.

Nevertheleſs, give me your attention—May you live long to comfort and delight your friends, to benefit and adorn ſociety.—May Heaven guide all your ſteps, and

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ſhower its choiceſt bleſſings on your heads! Still, the laſt hour muſt come — after the longeſt and the brighteſt day the ſun muſt ſet—and, truſt me, for this period, whenever it arrives, you will never repent of having begun too early to prepare.

My friends, were you aſſured of living far beyond the common period of mortality, it would be your wiſdom to begin life well, ſince nothing elſe can make it happy. But, on the ſlighteſt conſideration, you may be convinced, that of all uncertain things, the life of man is the moſt uncertain.

Do not ten thouſand accidents, big with fate, inceſſantly ſurround us? Do not ſeeds of diſeaſe lurk unperceived within our veins, which may break out before night in the moſt dangerous and alarming ſymptoms? Nay, is not the very ſtructure of this brittle machine ſufficient to convince us how liable it is to be diſordered, and how very ſlight a diſcompoſure of its fibres may prove fatal in a moment?

Look through the world—Is there any rank, or any age, or any ſituation ſecure from the attacks of death? Are the aſſemblies of the Young and of the Gay exempt from danger, however free from apprehenſion? Or, can any one promiſe himſelf with certainty another year, another day?——Is not then the preſent moment all that we can juſtly call our own?

It has been found, by actual calculation, that one half of the inhabitants of great towns die under three years old; and that one half of all that come into the world go out of it again in ſo ſhort a ſpace as the firſt ſeventeen or eighteen years.

Yes—Death often ſnatches the child from the parent, as well as the parent from the child—ſnatches from a mother's and a father's arms the ſmiling infant, or the accompliſhed

accompliſhed youth—like a ſweet bud, or full-blown bloſſom, torn from its native ſtem.

" As for man, his days are as graſs; as " a flower of the field, ſo he flouriſheth; " for the wind paſſeth over it, and it is " gone, and the place thereof ſhall know " it no more."

He comes forth from his Creator's hand, the prime production of Omnipotence, impreſſed with all the marks of God's wiſdom and bounty, and promiſing to become an honour to his Maker, an ornament of creation, and a bleſſing to the world. And yet, not the richeſt endowments—not treaſures of knowledge, powers of genius, ſenſibilities of heart, nor even the moſt diſtinguiſhed virtues,—accompanied with the grace of blooming youth—— can preſerve the poſſeſſor from an untimely grave.

Myſterious Providence! That ſo many rank weeds ſhould grow and flouriſh, while the faireſt flowers are cut down and withered!

But often, when all appears calm and bright to human obſervation, that watchful eye, which is ever fixed on virtue, marks the gathering ſtorm; and that gracious hand, which is continually ſtretched over her, removes the favoured plant from this chill region, to a milder and more friendly climate.

And you, my friends, the youngeſt of you all — the gayeſt and the beſt—whoſe proſpects open the moſt fair, and whoſe hearts beat higheſt with expectation—you too may be called away: — but then, I truſt, ſhall many a gentle and virtuous deed be recounted which adorned your early years, and ſome of the ſweeteſt tears affection ever ſhed flow at the expectation of what you ſhall be, and the memory of what you were!

"Let me die the death of the righteous,
"and let my latter end be like his!"

But theſe are ſcenes, which require the deepeſt and moſt ſolemn thought; and to prepare for them, is from firſt to laſt, the great buſineſs of life.

Borne upon the wings of time, we are continually advancing towards the verge of mortality. Every moment that flies, every pulſe that beats, brings us nearer and nearer to that awful boundary whence there is no return.—Think then, oh think, now,—while your cheek glows with health, and the ſtream of life runs freely through your veins—With what eyes ſhall I be able to look on my laſt enemy when he preſents himſelf to my immediate view! How ſhall I ſuſtain the attacks of pain, of languor, and of ſickneſs, which uſually precede the tyrant, and compoſe his diſmal train? How ſhall I bid farewell to the cheerful day —to the various purſuits which have occu-

pied my ſocial and my ſolitary hours—to the objects of my pleaſing hopes or anxious cares — to all that intereſts the affections of my heart, and attaches me to the preſent ſcene?

Alas! when ſtretched upon the bed of pain, or languiſhing in extreme decay,—while darkneſs is cloſing faſt around us,—and we are about to take our laſt view of this earthly manſion, to utter our laſt bleſſings upon ſurviving friends, and to receive the laſt tender proofs of their affection—what then ſhall quiet the alarms of the departing ſpirit, whiſper peace in that melancholy hour, and ſoften the pang of death?

Will a Soul that has been regardleſs of Religion, that is a ſtranger to its promiſes and hopes, be able calmly to ſuſtain this trying conflict? Will a trifling, timid ſpirit remain firm and collected amidſt the ruins of its diſſolving frame? Will gloomy viſions

ſions of the future afford conſolation under the load of preſent diſtreſs? Or, will a mind in terrors, and a body crumbling into duſt, be able mutually and effectually to ſupport each other?

No: the man who once laughed at religion, and bid defiance to every law human and divine—when the overwhelming waters are rolling over his head——graſps eagerly at every ſhattered reed of hope.

But, alas, it is now too late!

It is too late to lay the foundation of a religious character, in the midſt of pain and weakneſs, or under the confuſion of troubled thoughts and deep dejection. It is too late, when ſickneſs or old age has weakened and benumbed our faculties, and life itſelf is almoſt ebbed away.

This ſhould be our firſt object in the morning of life, as ſoon as reaſon dawns—while the mind is miſtreſs of herſelf, and

the current of life glides ſmoothly along. Then ſhould we inquire into our duty, our origin, and our end. Then ſhould we cultivate that unſhaken truſt in Providence, impreſs upon our minds that lively expectation of a future ſtate, and cheriſh all thoſe habits of piety and virtue, which can alone make life honourable, or death happy.

Firſt, we ſhould cultivate an habitual perſuaſion that, as we live, ſo we ſhall moſt aſſuredly die, in the preſence of a Moſt Gracious Father, who, in wiſdom and in mercy, appoints the time and circumſtances of our diſſolution, according to a ſcheme of univerſal goodneſs; that, therefore, we have reaſon to commit ourſelves, and all that is dear to us, into his hands with boundleſs confidence, and ſhould ſubmit to his will with cheerful reſignation.

Secondly, we ſhould impreſs upon our minds a ſtrong conviction of the reaſonable-

neſs and certainty of a future ſtate: in order that, when we come to die, we may indulge the cheering hope of being only removed to another region, where we ſhall find the ſame wiſdom and goodneſs, which we behold around us here, more glorioufly diſplayed; where all the beſt powers and faculties of our nature ſhall be inconceivably enlarged and improved; where we ſhall dwell for ever in the preſence of God, and in the ſociety of good men made perfect, and neither pain, nor death, nor any other evil, ſhall approach us more.

Thirdly, and which is by far of the greateſt moment, we ſhould labour to maintain a conſcience void of offence; that being enabled to look back through a ſeries of uſeful and honourable purſuits, and to reflect that in every ſituation we have endeavoured to diſcharge our duty, have been ſolicitous to improve in wiſdom and goodneſs, and have mourned with true penitence over our vices and our follies, we may

may look up to God with humble confidence and hope, and with the conſciouſneſs of "having been faithful over a few "things" may expect to have more and greater committed to our truſt; — that ſo far from being forſaken by the Maſter whom we have ſerved, we ſhall be raiſed higher in his ſervice, and admitted to ſuperior ſcenes of action and enjoyment, which ſhall be opened to us never to cloſe.

Theſe are the great remedies againſt the fear of death—Truſt in Divine Providence —Perſuaſion of a future ſtate—and the Teſtimony of a good conſcience.

Be aſſured that theſe, and theſe alone, will give a man peace at the laſt.

And theſe conſolations, my friends, it ſhould be the ſtudy of our whole lives to acquire. Yes; we ſhould endeavour to give to all our thoughts and deſires, our plans

plans and purſuits, ſo deep a tincture of them, and even mix them ſo entirely with the very ſubſtance of the ſoul, that they may by no poſſibility be taken from us, but remain with us unchangeable through every viciſſitude; and under all the decays of nature, as well as the aſſaults of adverſity—"while the outward man periſheth, the "inward man may be renewed day by "day".

In all the emergencies of life, the principles and habits of Religion are our beſt comforters; but in the hour of death, they will be our only ones: and, truſt me, we ſhall then ſtand in need of all the aid and encouragement which they can beſtow.

But if you are conſcious of having devoted your days to God; if you have made religion your firſt choice as well as laſt refuge—then, whether you are called to a late or to an early grave, you may,

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at the call of your Gracious Parent, embark for your eternal home, with peace and reſignation ſmiling at the heart.

Time or ſickneſs may ſhed a languor over the bodily frame: the eyes may languiſh, the heart melt, the fleſh fail: but you ſhall have that within which will ſuſtain you under every pang and every fear; beams of heavenly comfort ſhall brighten round you to the laſt moment of this earthly pilgrimage; and, in accents of peace, the Chriſtian ſhall breathe out his ſoul. "Father of mercies, into thy hands "I commend my ſpirit."

Then be prevailed upon to embrace thoſe fleeting moments which youth and health afford — while you are free from vicious habits; while the practice of virtue is moſt eaſy to yourſelves and moſt acceptable to God; while life opens wide before you, and preſents a glorious field of improvement—Oh, ſeize theſe invaluable moments, that

that you may lay up ſuch ſtores of wiſdom and goodneſs, as will enrich all your days with comfort, uſefulneſs, and honour; and, finally, crown them with everlaſting happineſs!

SERMON

SERMON XIII.

ON THE RENEWAL OF VIRTUOUS FRIENDSHIP IN A FUTURE STATE.

John xvii. 24. *Father, I will that they alſo whom thou haſt given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou haſt given me.*

THESE words are part of our Saviour's laſt prayer: and, as they not only breathe the ſpirit of ſtrong affection to his immediate followers, but open the moſt intereſting and delightful views of futurity to Chriſtians in every age, they are calculated to draw our utmoſt attention.

Our Saviour knew that the hour of his departure was at hand.—The idea of his faithful followers recurred to his mind with more than common tenderneſs. To take leave of the beloved John, of the zealous Peter, and of all the reſt, who

who had followed him with ſo much fidelity of attachment was an affecting occaſion. He was now to give them his laſt inſtructions—to pour out for them his laſt prayers. And not for them only, but for thoſe alſo who ſhould believe on him through their word: "that they all may be one, as thou, "Father, art in me, and I in thee; "that they alſo may be one in us:" and thus between his Father, himſelf, his diſciples, and all who ſhould ever be converted to truth and virtue—might be formed a perfect and indiſſoluble union.

But what, in this diſcourſe, I have chiefly in view, is—the ſublime example, which is here preſented to us, of Friendſhip looking beyond this vale of tears for ſome peaceful aſylum in a happier ſtate. It is the example of One, to whom the ſecrets of futurity lay open; of One, to whom "all power in heaven and earth was given;" but who, though

inveſted with the dignity of a ſovereign, held dearer the names of brother and of friend.

Hence we are naturally led to extend our views to friendſhip in general; and to the pleaſing expectation—which I hope to ſhew is as rational as it is pleaſing—that thoſe attachments in this life, which are founded on virtue, ſhall be renewed and perpetuated in the manſions of eternal happineſs.

This is an expectation ſo congenial to the human heart, that wherever men have entertained the idea of a future ſtate, it has conſtantly prevailed. We find it glowing in the ſublime deſcriptions of the ancient poets; which, no doubt, took their riſe from the popular notions and traditions of their reſpective ages and countries*. We find it alſo adopted

* Veniſti tandem, tuaque expectata parenti
Vicit iter durum pietas! datur ora tueri,

Nate

adopted in the graveſt diſcourſes of the wiſeſt heathen philoſophers.

"Oh, glorious day!" ſays Cicero, ſpeaking in the character of Cato, "when I ſhall retire from this low and "ſordid ſcene, to aſſociate with the "divine aſſembly of departed ſpirits: "and not with thoſe only whom I juſt "now mentioned, but with my dear "Cato; that beſt of ſons, and moſt valu-"able of men! It was my ſad fate to "lay his body on the funeral pile, when "by the courſe of nature I had reaſon "to hope, he would have performed "the ſame laſt office to mine. His "ſoul, however, did not deſert me, "but ſtill looked back upon me in its "flight to thoſe happy manſions, to

Nate, tua, et notas audire et reddere voces!
ÆNEID. Lib. vi.

ψυκη δε ποδωκεως Αιακιδαο
Φοιτα μακρα βιβωσα κ καθ' ασφοδελον λειμωνα,
Γηθοσυνη ο οι υιον εφην αριδεικετον ειναι.
ΟΔΥΣ. Λ.

"which,

" which he was aſſured I ſhould one day
" follow him. If I ſeemed to bear his
" death with fortitude, it was by no
" means that I did not moſt ſenſibly feel
" the loſs I had ſuſtained; it was be-
" cauſe I ſupported myſelf with the
" conſoling reflection, that we could
" not long be ſeparated.*"

" If, O Judges!" ſays Socrates, " we
" may rely upon the aſſertion that death
" is only a paſſage from this ſtate to an-
" other, in which all thoſe who have de-
" parted before us are collected together,
" then would it indeed be an event of
" a moſt deſirable nature. Entering into
" thoſe fortunate regions we ſhall eſcape
" from the tyrannical decrees of men
" ho call themſelves adminiſtrators of
" juſtice, to meet the ſentence of thoſe
" whoſe integrity cannot be miſtruſted:
" there ſhall we appear before the tri-
" bunal of Minos, and Rhadamanthus,

* Melmoth's Tranſlation of Cic. de Sen.

" and Æacus, and Triptolemus, and
" of thoſe other demi-gods, whoſe ex-
" alted virtues in this life have now re-
" ceived an adequate reward. And is
" this change of condition to be con-
" ſidered as of ſmall importance? At
" what price too can we eſtimate the
" pleaſure of holding converſe with Or-
" pheus, with Muſæus, with Heſiod,
" and with Homer? If ſuch be death,
" how often would I die to taſte of its
" delights! To me it would be won-
" derfully pleaſihg, to mix in the ſo-
" ciety of ſuch men as Palamede and
" Ajax, who, like myſelf, have fallen
" a ſacrifice to unrighteous judgment;
" and to compare my own ſufferings
" with their's. But what I have moſt
" at heart is, to paſs my time in that
" world, as I have done in this, in a
" cloſe inveſtigation of the characters of
" men, that I might diſtinguiſh the
" poſſeſſor of true wiſdom from the
" ſlave of folly and ſelf-conceit. There,
" O, Judges,

" O, judges, I ſhall enjoy the privi-
" lege of queſtioning the conqueror of
" Troy himſelf, of minutely examining
" the diſpoſition of Ulyſſes, of Siſyphus,
" and of innumerable other perſons of
" both ſexes, whoſe company and con-
" verſation I ſhould prize above all things.
" — This muſt be indeed an inconceiv-
" able happineſs; a happineſs too, which,
" as we are informed, ſhall not be liable
" to the aſſault either of malice or of
" fortune; but unalterably ſecured to
" its poſſeſſor through an everlaſting
" exiſtence*."

Nay, we may trace this opinion into ſtill more remote antiquity. For example: " He died, and was gathered unto " his fathers," an expreſſion ſo often occurring in the firſt book of the Old Teſtament—" I ſhall go to him, but he " ſhall not return to me," which were

* Plat. Soc. Apol.

the words of David, upon the death of a favourite child*: beſides many other paſſages which imply ſome tincture of this opinion in thoſe early ages, ariſing either from the remains of ancient tradition, or from the natural ſentiments of the heart.

If we turn from theſe ambiguous lights to the brighter diſcoveries of the goſpel, we are there taught, not only that we ſhall live hereafter, but that we ſhall live in the ſociety of thoſe, the loſs of whom we now deplore, and remain with them for ever: "For," ſays the apoſtle Paul, "if we believe that Jeſus "died, and roſe again, even ſo them "alſo which ſleep in Jeſus will God "bring with him.—Then we which are "alive, and remain, ſhall be caught up "together with them in the clouds, to "meet the Lord in the air; and ſo ſhall

* 2 Sam. xii. 23.

"we

"we ever be with the Lord.*" And in a former chapter, "For what is our hope, "or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not "even ye in the preſence of our Lord "Jeſus Chriſt, at his coming†?"

From theſe paſſages it ſeems evident, that the ſpirits of the juſt are not to be conveyed into different and far diſtant regions of the univerſe, but are to be aſſembled under the dominion of their Saviour, and placed in one common ſtate of happineſs:—conſequently, if thoſe attachments by which they have been united here, ſhall remain hereafter, they will aſſuredly meet with the moſt liberal indulgence. But whether they ſhall remain or not, is a queſtion upon which revelation obſerves perhaps the ſame ſilence, as with reſpect to contracting them in this life. Yet as this ſilence could not be intended to diſcountenance that

* 1 Theſſ. iv. 14—17. † Theſſ. ii. 19.

cordial intercourſe between generous minds, which is directed to the joint purſuit of virtue; ſo neither ſhould it diſcourage the natural and reaſonable hope that this intercourſe ſhall hereafter be renewed and carried to perfection. For although, in the ſacred writings, there are no direct precepts enjoining us to contract ſuch friendſhips, on the one hand, nor, on the other, any explicit aſſurances that they ſhall be renewed in a future ſtate; yet there are principles laid down, from which we may with the higheſt probability infer, that ſuch virtuous attachments are pleaſing to God, and that when once formed, they ſhall never be diſſolved.

Great as muſt be the change, the future ſtate is always repreſented as cloſely connected with, and depending upon, the preſent. Whether we ſhall riſe to the rank of angels, or be numbered with

the

the ſons of darkneſs, depends upon the habitual temper of the mind.

Now what is this habitual temper but the reſult of the actions we have done, the reflections we have cheriſhed, the ſcenes through which we have paſſed, and the joint impreſſion that all theſe have left upon the mind; which, as it is in favour of virtue or of vice, fixes the character, and will accordingly conſign us to the realms of happineſs or of woe?

But were every trace of former ſcenes, and actions, and reflections, to be obliterated, it is evident that none of them could communicate any tincture to our future ſentiments, nor hang any bias upon our future actions; and conſequently that, upon this ſuppoſition, not one habit could remain.

If then, as it is moſt reaſonable to believe —it is a temper of prevailing goodneſs,

a combination of love to God, and man, and virtue, engraven upon the ſoul, and rendered indelible, which is the great qualification for future felicity, it undeniably follows, that the remembrance of this introductory ſtate in which all our habits are acquired, muſt remain; otherwiſe the habits themſelves would be loſt, and with them every characteriſtical diſtinction which diſcriminates the good from the bad, or cauſes one man to differ from another.

Accordingly, in the repreſentation which our Saviour gives of the general judgment, we find him not merely paſſing ſentence upon the righteous and the wicked, but declaring to each the particular grounds on which the ſentence is founded. To what end, if they were to retain no recollection of the paſt? In this caſe, they could neither be conſcious of the juſtice nor of the injuſtice of the ſentence. Moreover, we find the wicked endeavouring to extenuate

ate their guilt, and the righteous likewiſe modeſtly depreciating their merit; which evidently implies the recollection of their former actions, and conſequently the ſcenes, perſons, and circumſtances, relating to them, upon which the nature of the actions themſelves in a great meaſure depends.

Hence we may infer, that, notwithſtanding the gradual decay of our faculties in old age;—notwithſtanding the various organs of the body are ſeen to moulder away, and the very ſeat of thought, memory, and reaſon, is apparently reduced to common duſt; yet when the Divine power ſhall reſtore and reanimate this mortal frame, all traces of former things ſhall not be blotted from our remembrance: but we ſhall aſſuredly be conſcious, that we are the ſame beings who once lived upon this earth; paſſed through the various ſcenes of life; are now riſen from the grave, awaiting our

ſentence from the great tribunal—and about to enter upon a new and unchanging ſtate.—If we really are the ſame beings, we muſt be conſcious that we are the ſame: at leaſt, without this conſciouſneſs, our exiſtence can ſcarcely with propriety be ſaid either to be continued or renewed.

Perhaps I may go further. It is poſſible that our memories may give us a clearer and fuller retroſpect than ever. As, in the morning after ſound repoſe, we ſometimes recollect paſt occurrences more perfectly than in the preceding evening; ſo it may be at the general reſurrection.—What inconceivable happineſs or miſery muſt this create!

But if we ſhall hereafter remember any thing which relates to the preſent ſtate, it muſt be thoſe things which have moſt deeply intereſted our affections:—thoſe perſons, with whom we have

have had the moſt frequent intercourſe; among whom the chief ſcenes of our trial have paſſed; and whoſe deſtinies have been interwoven with our own.

Friends, for example, who have grown up together from their tender years, and whoſe lives have been mingled in one common ſtream, how can they forget each other while they retain any recollection of themſelves?

And if we cannot but remember thoſe who have been our fellow travellers through the vale of mortality; nor yet remember them, without alſo recollecting how much they have heightened our joys, and alleviated our ſorrows, without calling to mind a thouſand inſtances of their affection, a thouſand claims upon our gratitude;—can the ſpirits of heaven be ungrateful or unjuſt?—or can they withhold the tribute of affection where it is ſo eminently due?

But

But what is ſufficient to baniſh every doubt is, that the happy conſequences of friendſhip may extend to Eternity; and, conſequently, we may be under mutual obligations to everlaſting gratitude.

Behold an orphan abandoned to the world. Poverty and wretchedneſs are his only inheritance. Guilt, ſhame, and ruin, have almoſt marked him for their own.—But the pitiable caſe draws compaſſion from the heart of ſome generous benefactor. He takes the helpleſs victim under his foſtering wing; watches over him like a parent; leads him ſtep by ſtep to happineſs and honour; and points out the path which he himſelf has trod to joys that know no end.——I appeal not to the heart, but to the underſtanding. Is it poſſible, when this orphan ſhall meet his benefactor in heaven that they can meet as ſtrangers? That the very benefits ariſing from ſuch diſintereſted

diſintereſted kindneſs can outlive the gratitude of an ingenuous mind? But are not the benefits which this orphan has received everlaſting benefits? Muſt not his gratitude be everlaſting too? Can he ſtill exiſt and forget his benefactor? If not, then there are attachments which are not loſt in death.

Again; behold two friends—friends to virtue and mankind, and endeared one to another by the nobleneſs of their common purſuits: inſeparable companions, they had ſingled out each other from all the world: both of them exquiſitely ſenſible to all the integrity and all the delicacy of friendſhip, it was their ſtudy not to flatter, but to improve each other: and, as they paſſed through life, while their cheerfulneſs beguiled the tediouſneſs of the way, the fidelity of their mutual counſels rendered it ſecure from danger: and thus were they advancing, with

with a rapid and uninterrupted progreſs, to perfection.

Now when theſe kindred ſpirits ſhall riſe from the duſt, in the ſemblance of angels—can death have burſt aſunder all former ties, when it could not deſtroy that virtue which at firſt endeared them to each other, and which grew up together with their growing friendſhip? On the contrary, when that virtue ſhall be made perfect, and crowned with everlaſting happineſs, ſhall not the ſame powerful attraction be ſtill more ſtrongly felt? And what ſhall prevent this union of ſouls from ſtrengthening in proportion to their encreaſing excellence, and being perpetuated through the endleſs ages of their duration?

We might go on to bring inſtances from all the tender relations and intimate connexions of human life. There is not one, but may be conſecrated by virtue and

and religion, and rendered conducive to the happineſs of eternity; and theſe obligations will be remembered, when all combinations of vanity or pleaſure—much more confederacies in vice—which are too often dignified by the name of friendſhip, but without the reality, ſhall be utterly diſſolved and loſt.

No doubt our taſte and ſentiments will be conſiderably changed; and our judgment will be regulated by a juſter and manlier ſtandard. True merit will then be the ground of preference. Our gratitude will riſe according to the value of benefits; and our eſteem will be proportioned to the degree of genuine worth: our regard will be reaſon, and our friendſhip virtue.

As, in childhood, we are prone to form attachments without reflection, upon which, in maturer years, we look back with contempt; ſo there may be

many attachments broken off, as unworthy of the future world, which we have cheriſhed with a partial fondneſs in the preſent. Yet, on the other hand, ſince thoſe friendſhips which began with the dawn of life, and are continued to the cloſe, glow with an ardour and tenderneſs far ſuperior to thoſe which commenced at a later period, we may conclude that friendſhips which take their riſe in this world, and grow to full maturity in the next, ſhall form the ſtrongeſt and the moſt endearing links in the chain of univerſal being, and become the ſource of exquiſite and inconceivable delight, through all eternity.

But many cauſes of preference which have a wonderful influence on earth, will, no doubt, for ever ceaſe in heaven. Here virtue ſometimes appears in an unamiable diſguiſe; while vice ſhews herſelf in the moſt attractive and ſeducing form. Elegant language and poliſhed manners

manners and poliſhed language are often ſubſtituted in the ſtead of ſubſtantial worth: and it is but too natural to open our hearts to the deceitful flatterer, while we ſhut them againſt the rigid friend — to prefer the ſplendour of outward ſhow to the unadorned ſimplicity of real merit. But, hereafter, theſe deluſions will ceaſe: vice will appear as vice: virtue as virtue: and when all the virtuous ſhall riſe from the corruption of the grave, in ſuch reſplendent forms as will throw the darkeſt ſhade over every earthly grace — what then ſhall become of the engaging perſon, the winning countenance, and all the charm of outward deportment?

Theſe are diſtinctions which muſt be for ever loſt in ſuperior ſplendours.— Nor ſhall the ſpecious and inſinuating arts of adulation any longer deceive. No homage which has been paid to our pride; no abject compliance with our paſſions; no weak and abſurd indul-

gence to our errors and our faults, ſhall then be regarded with the leaſt complacency or allowance. Yet after every unjuſt claim upon our affections ſhall be aboliſhed, true friendſhip and genuine worth will remain unchangeably the ſame. Not one moral grace which adorns the ſoul, but will ſhine out in perfect beauty. Not one of Virtue's faithful and conſtant votaries, but will appear in ſuch majeſtic brightneſs, as Virtue herſelf would aſſume, could virtue become viſible to ſenſe. While thoſe exalted ſpirits, whoſe friendſhip ſoars above this world, and who aim at ſhowering eternal bleſſings upon thoſe they love, ſhall reſemble the ſtars of heaven amidſt their revolving orbs, and "ſhine as the brightneſs of the firma-"ment, for ever and ever *."

But here an objection ariſes, or ſeems to ariſe. If in that world of purer

* Dan. xii. 3.

light

light, all local prejudices and temporary prepoſſeſſions ſhall be no more, will not every partial attachment tothoſe who have been our deareſt friends on earth, be utterly abſorbed, and loſt in that univerſal ſympathy which muſt pervade thoſe happy regions, where ſhall be aſſembled all the virtuous that have exiſted from the foundation of the world? For if it be virtue which we love, and there are millions around us equally virtuous; why ſhould we not love them equally? What can produce any change in the degree of our affection, when the merit of its object is the ſame?

I anſwer—Gratitude.—It was you, my father—ſays the orphan to his benefactor,—who brought me to this world of bliſs. — It was you, the guardian of my early years, who inſtilled into my mind counſels of wiſdom, and taught me to reverence the law of everlaſting truth. ——It was you, the friend of my ſoul,

who at firſt inſpired me with the love of virtue; and drew me, by irreſiſtible ſympathy, to emulate your own.

Theſe are bonds of union which death cannot burſt aſunder.

But ſuppoſe friendſhip to be placed upon a level with love to the univerſal family of God; we are ſtill warranted to look for ſomething more exalted, more refined, more exquiſitely tender, than the nobleſt attachments of this world can boaſt. Among perfect ſpirits there will be perfect amity. The friendſhip of angels will be exalted as their nature. It may be, that the affection which all ſhall feel for all, will tranſcend to that which we are now capable of feeling for one.—And ſhall they, whoſe virtue attached our hearts below, and whom virtue hath advanced to the regions of univerſal love, be finally excluded from that boundleſs affection,

in which all heaven participates? To find ourſelves encompaſſed, not only with thoſe whom we loved and honoured here, but with thouſands and ten thouſands who reſemble them, may heighten our delight, but cannot diminiſh our affection.

For why ſhould the univerſal harmony of the future world diſſolve one ſingle tie of ſympathy, eſteem, or gratitude, by which the hearts of individuals were united in this world? There private friendſhip will be no confederacy againſt public good. There, in order to be friends to one, we need not become enemies or rivals to any other. There no attachments ſhall take place, but thoſe of the pureſt virtue; no combinations, but thoſe of the moſt diffuſive benevolence. And, therefore, it is not leſs the dictate of Reaſon, than the ſentiment of Nature—that the cordial affection which has been enkindled between

virtuous minds during the firſt ſtage of their exiſtence, inſtead of being extinguiſhed in the abode of univerſal love, ſhall rather be improved into all the ardours of the place, and glow for ever with a warmth unknown to theſe colder regions of mortality;—that they who have been aſſociates in goodneſs here, when advanced to thoſe employments in which angels and the ſpirits of the bleſſed engage, whether acts of high devotion or benevolence, ſhall ſtill co-operate with each other as on earth;—and that the harmony of ſouls, which even in this imperfect ſtate raiſed them ſo high in virtue and in happineſs—ſhall remain the ſource of growing excellence, as well as of pure and exquiſite enjoyment, through the ages of eternity.

From the whole we may draw the following concluſions:

If

If Friendſhip be deſtined to ſurvive the wreck of time, what a high value does this conſideration ſtamp upon it! To think that we are converſing, not with thoſe who are to be our companions for a day, but with whom we hope to ſpend a happy immortality—what cordiality! what endearment! what inexpreſſible ſatisfaction muſt this add to our whole intercourſe! And what a ſtrong incentive is it to cultivate ſuch a delightful harmony of minds!

Moreover, as we are taught to look upon Friendſhip in a more reſpectable light, by conſidering it as a bond of union never to be diſſolved; this ſhould make us cautious in the choice of friends. None but the virtuous can be our friends after death; nor will any attachment, which is not founded upon virtue, be laſting in life. To cultivate any other attachment therefore, will both embitter our preſent

peace, and expoſe us to the pangs of an eternal ſeparation.

But as we have ground to hope that our connexion with the virtuous will, hereafter, improve into a more perfect union in proportion to the excellence of our reſpective characters; this ſhould excite our warmeſt deſires and endeavours to advance that excellence, by reciprocally diſcharging all the duties of friendſhip. Faithful counſels, admonitions, and ſometimes reproofs, are as much the duties of friendſhip, as congratulation in proſperity, or condolence in diſtreſs; difficult indeed, it may be unpleaſing in the performance, nor always perhaps the moſt acceptable; but ſtill we ſhould remember that ſuch exalted acts of diſintereſted kindneſs will confer an everlaſting obligation, even though not acknowledged at preſent.

And

And as this delightful hope of a reunion with all our virtuous friends ſhould engage us to improve the intercourſe of friendſhip for the higheſt purpoſes, ſo it will ſooth the pangs of our affliction when this intercourſe ſhall be interrupted by the ſtroke of death.—It is painful to look into the grave of one whom we love: nature melts within us at the ſight. But, methinks, it ſhould dry the tears of the mourning parent, or the forſaken orphan, to think that though they have loſt—the one, the ſtaff of his declining age; the other, the guide of his youth—yet they ſhall be finally reſtored to each other, never more to be ſeparated. Let this proſpect then change the bitterneſs of grief into a ſadly pleaſing remembrance. Let it inſpire the mourner with reſignation; and cheer his ſolitary ſteps, that he is perpetually drawing nearer to the land of everlaſting friendſhip and of everlaſting joy.

Do we then look forward to a ſtate where we ſhall be reunited to all we loved, valued, and delighted in, with them to partake for ever, of the riches of Divine munificence—how great, how exquiſite, muſt be the happineſs of being admitted there!—After having been toſſed upon this tempeſtuous ocean, and apparently ſwallowed up, with all whom they loved, in the dark abyſs—the parent to meet his long-loſt child—the widow to be given to the partner of her ſoul—brothers to brothers, and friends to friends; to find themſelves ſtill in poſſeſſion of all their hearts held dear; and on that peaceful ſhore, where no ſtorms can ariſe, but all is perfect harmony and endleſs joy—what language can paint the happineſs of ſuch a ſcene?

Can any conſideration operate more powerfully upon the ingenuous mind, as an inducement to a life of virtue?

Let

Let imagination range through the moſt delightful ſocial periods of life. Recall the memory of thoſe with whom many a winter's evening and ſummer's day have rolled in the pleaſing intercourſe of affection. Think of the mild wiſdom, the parental counſels, of the guardians of your youth. Think of thoſe friends who loved you with an affection that no time, no diſtance, could efface, but whoſe memory is all the treaſure now left you to cheriſh. You who have known what it is to bow beneath the heavieſt ſtroke of heaven.—Do you not hear a voice from the tomb, calling upon you to be virtuous, and to be bleſſed? It is the voice of departed friendſhip.—Do you not ſee a hand which beckons you to the ſhore of eternal glory? It is the ſummons of a father—mother—brother—ſiſter—the child of your hopes—the partner of your cares—the friend of your heart—whoſe duſt you honour, and over whoſe

grave

grave you have often wept. Lo, friendſhip ſtoops from heaven to allure you thither! Behold your anceſtors, a venerable band, together with all whom you ever loved and honoured, ranged in the eternal ſeats of bliſs! Behold Jeſus, the patron of truth and virtue! the friend of human kind! the Prince of Peace!

And can you bear to ſee yourſelf excluded from them all, by that dreadful gulph, which muſt for ever ſeparate the righteous from the wicked?

Shall not virtue then be ever dear to your heart, while you cheriſh their remembrance? Will you not copy their example, and tread in their ſteps?—— with trembling eagerneſs mount the ſame bright aſcent—nor ſtop till you have attained thoſe happy manſions, where they are waiting to welcome your arrival?—

arrival?—and where you ſhall be for ever joined, not only to thoſe whom you loved on earth, but to all the bleſſed inhabitants of heaven — to the ſpirits of the juſt made perfect! to an innumerable company of angels! to Jeſus the mediator of the new covenant! and to God the everlaſting Father and Friend of all! Amen!

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

ON THE CHARACTER OF THE APOSTLE JOHN.

John xxi. 20. *Then Peter turning about, ſeeth the diſciple whom Jeſus loved, following;*——

NOTHING can be more pleaſing to the mind of a Chriſtian, than to obſerve the marks of a pious and excellent diſpoſition in our Saviour himſelf, and in his immediate followers. Goodneſs, wherever it is beheld, is always an agreeable object of contemplation. But the virtues of thoſe who were the founders of our religion, are the firmeſt pillars of our faith: and whatever throws a luſtre on their characters, at once brightens our proſpect of that eternal kingdom which they

they have revealed, and proportionably ſtrengthens our endeavours after that holineſs which they enjoin.

In the text we have an exquiſite picture of the Apoſtle John, drawn by himſelf at a ſingle ſtroke; than which I do not know any thing more likely to make an impreſſion upon minds poſſeſſed of genuine ſenſibility, in favour of religion and virtue. But let us look back to the former part of the chapter.

After our Lord's reſurrection, he ſhewed himſelf to his diſciples, among other places, at the ſea of Tiberias. While they were fiſhing, he ſtood on the ſhore. They had toiled all night, and caught nothing; but, in the morning, at the command of Jeſus, their net was filled. This convincing them that it was their maſter, though before they knew him not, Peter inſtantly threw himſelf into the ſea, and ſwam to ſhore;

and

and the reſt of the diſciples followed in a ſhip. A fire of coals they found ready kindled, with fiſh laid thereon, and bread. After they had dined, Jeſus addreſſes himſelf, three times, to Peter in theſe words: "Simon, ſon of Jonas, "loveſt thou me?" After each reply, full of warm affection, commanding him to feed his ſheep or lambs; and, at laſt, predicting that he ſhould be crucified in his old age; which accordingly was accompliſhed at Rome. Immediately after this, our Lord walking forward, calls upon Peter to follow him, as a token of his readineſs to ſuffer in his cauſe. While Peter is giving this proof of attachment, he ſuddenly turns round, and ſees the diſciple whom Jeſus loved, following.

It is in this ſingle act of the beloved diſciple that we can trace his character. Our Lord calls upon Peter to follow him; and Peter obeys the call. But

John riſes uncalled; and, from an involuntary impulſe of affection, claims his right to tread thoſe painful ſteps which his maſter had trodden before him. Yet ſo far from being clamorous or aſſuming in his zeal, or with empty profeſſions preſſing foremoſt, he is content to remain behind, and is diſcovered only by accident.

The ſame modeſty is conſpicuous in the relation, as in the fact. For it is not mentioned, as a principal part of the ſtory, but in order to introduce what follows. "Then Peter turning "about, ſeeth the diſciple whom Jeſus "loved, following; and ſaith, Lord, "what ſhall this man do?" But John—too full of affection to be ſuſceptible either of curioſity or vanity, aſks no queſtions, makes no proteſtations, claims no merit, ſhews no ſolicitude for himſelf—though he cannot refrain from ſilently following.

In

In this account, two circumſtances demand our attention. The firſt is, John's promptneſs and alacrity in following his maſter. He follows, uncalled. The ſecond is, the modeſt ſimplicity of his behaviour. He follows, in ſilence. Both are very intereſting and inſtructive; holding forth an example to us all, which we cannot copy too cloſely in the conduct of life.

Firſt, we may remark a certain promptneſs and alacrity in the diſcharge of duty, which is conſpicuous in this action of the apoſtle John. He could not ſit ſtill, when an occaſion was preſented of expreſſing his attachment to his maſter. Though the act of riſing, and walking after Jeſus, was trifling and indifferent in itſelf; yet much was implied in it. It was a ſtrong, though tacit, declaration of willingneſs to follow him through life, and through death, to his eternal kingdom. It was

fervent zeal, eager to ſeize the firſt occaſion of expreſſing itſelf. It diſcloſed his inmoſt ſoul beyond all pomp of words; and, no doubt, would be regarded by him who ſearches the heart, as equivalent to the nobleſt actions.

It is by outward acts alone, that men can judge of us: but God looks into the heart: approves or condemns by what paſſes there; and wherever he diſcerns a will obedient and reſigned, this muſt be ever precious in his ſight, though not yet called forth, either to act, or to ſuffer.

Many there are who ſtand chargeable with no flagrant guilt, or notorious neglect of duty; yet, being deſtitute of a warm principle of love to God, to their Saviour, and to their fellow-creatures, never entertain the idea of any high attainment, but content themſelves with eſcaping the ſtings and terrors of conſcience.

ſcience. Wherever too the limits of virtue and vice are not ſtrongly marked, and eſpecially if their be any conſiderable difficulty in adhering to their duty, they are extremely prone to ſelf-indulgence and ſelf-deceit. Religion forms no part of their happineſs. It is not received into their boſom, as a friend;—as the heightener of their joys, and ſoother of their ſorrows; but as an imperious maſter, whoſe commands are unwelcome, yet muſt be obeyed; which therefore, they reſolve to obey no further than neceſſity requires. They are influenced by no other principle than that of ſervile fear; and while they dread the puniſhment, they hate the means by which it might be avoided.

How differently will that man act, who is governed by the ſpirit of true affection! To him every hardſhip is eaſy: every burthen is light. He does not wait till it is a crime to be unmov-

ed. He is not ſolicitous to avoid the moſt glaring improprieties of conduct merely, and begin at laſt to rouſe himſelf to action, when he has long ſought in vain for any colourable evaſion. He ſprings forward to meet his duty with delight, and flies with eagerneſs, wherever it calls him. The field of virtue is to him the field of pleaſure. Nothing can be more grateful to his heart than to be the inſtrument of ſerving God, or benefiting mankind. He looks round with ſecret impatience for ſome happy occaſion; and, when he has found it, rejoices more than the miſer, in diſcovering hidden treaſure, or the man of ambition in adding freſh laurels to his brow.

How amiable is true religion, which, ſo far from ſhackling the mind, and oppoſing perpetually the propenſities of nature, is the ſpontaneous tribute of affection to the beſt of maſters, who

regards

regards the heart alone, and will either be ſerved with ingenuous freedom, or not ſerved at all!

Such eminently, was the diſpoſition which diſtinguiſhed the apoſtle John. Yet with all this ardour of zeal and fidelity of attachment, we ſee him checked by the moſt refined delicacy. He follows behind, inſtead of ruſhing foremoſt; and, far from the parade of loud profeſſions, he follows in ſilence. This is the true ſpirit of affection; which, perfectly free from oſtentation, and diſembarraſſed from ſelfiſh regards, is wholly directed to its object. The apoſtle does not look round for ſpectators. He has no worldly intereſts in view. He dreads no ſufferings.—Lord, to thy ſervice I cheerfully devote my days! Command me to any duty, however painful and laborious, I welcome thy gracious will! Bid me take up my croſs, and renounce every

earthly proſpect, I follow thy glorious ſteps with joy!—This was the language of that eloquent ſilence; and it was addreſſed to his maſter alone. Not doubting that theſe ſentiments would be infallibly known, and would be highly grateful to him; he reſts ſatisfied in the conviction, that he is approved at preſent, and that he ſhall not be unrewarded in the end.

Indeed good and kind affections are their own reward. They are the moſt delightful ſenſations of the ſoul; ſmoothing the brow, and dilating the heart; diſperſing the cares, and brightening all the proſpects of life. Poor and ſickly are the joys of vanity and ambition, compared with thoſe of the generous, affectionate heart!

Apply this to Chriſtians of the preſent day, when our Lord no more appears in perſon, and all the proof of attachment

attachment which we can give, is that of endeavouring to be like him, by acting kindly to each other; and you will ſtill have cauſe, above all things, to admire that unaffected ſimplicity of character and ſingleneſs of heart, which, wholly intent upon the path of duty, holds on its retired but glorious courſe, and looks for no reward but conſcious virtue, and the approbation of God.—That ſilent, ever-flowing ſtream of unaſſuming goodneſs—how beautiful does it appear, compared with the ſwelling tide of vanity, for ever agitated by the breath of popular favour!

True benevolence, founded on true piety, carries peace and joy, wherever it flows. It is a common bleſſing. But the mere affectation of it is often dangerous and deſtructive in its courſe; or at leaſt ſpends itſelf in empty ſhew, and ſeldom produces any valuable fruit. Hence vain minds continually incur the contempt

contempt of others, as well as their own. If they are ſometimes ſoothed with adulation, they are ſtill more liable to be mortified by neglect. The utmoſt they can hope is the joyleſs tribute of unmerited applauſe, while the ſting of cenſure is envenomed by the conſciouſneſs of having deſerved it.

How prepoſterous! To be miſerable, unleſs all eyes are upon them; yet every moment in danger of being detected by that univerſal notice which they court! But the real virtues of the heart, as they dread no ſcrutiny, ſo they are not ſolicitous to provoke one. Their operation is often, like that of providence, in ſecret; but their effects are noble the joy that accompanies them is ſincere, and the applauſe that follows, is genuine and laſting.

No wonder then, with ſuch diſpoſitions as John poſſeſſed, that he ſhould be

be our Saviour's favourite diſciple. Such warmth of affection, ſuch alacrity of obedience, ſuch artleſs ſimplicity as diſtinguiſhed his character, muſt raiſe him high in the eſteem of Jeſus; and between hearts like theirs, there could not but ariſe a powerful ſympathy. What muſt the friend of publicans and ſinners feel for one who bore ſo ſtrong a reſemblance to himſelf! What muſt be John's triumph in every inſtance of his maſter's eſteem, and every expreſſion of his own gratitude! Had he been ſenſible to ambitious deſires, never could ambition have been more abundantly gratified. But every ſelfiſh view was utterly abſorbed in generous affection.

How amiable then does the character of John appear, in being thus devoted to Jeſus; and that of Jeſus, which was able to inſpire ſuch ſtrength of attachment!

Hence

Hence ſurely ariſes no inconſiderable argument for the Truth and Divinity of the Chriſtian Religion. The founders of it were not men of diſingenuous, crooked diſpoſitions; but of exalted minds; capable of all that is generous and godlike. We have ſuch unambiguous proofs of the ſimplicity and nobleneſs of their ſpirit, that we cannot but believe them abſolutely incapable of engaging in a deliberate impoſture. Among numberleſs inſtances, we may particularly advert to the incident to which our text alludes; an incident, which, ſtriking as it was, and flowing from a heart big with emotions neither to be uttered nor ſuppreſſed, we are left to collect from expreſſions, that were evidently dropped without deſign.

"And when Jeſus had ſpoken this," that is, when he had ſignified to Peter by what death he ſhould glorify God, "He ſaith unto him, follow me. Then

"Peter

"Peter turning about, ſeeth the diſci-
"ple whom Jeſus loved, following;
"and ſaith, Lord, what ſhall this man
"do? Jeſus replies, if I will that he
"tarry till I come, what is that to
"thee? Follow thou me;" hereby rebuking Peter's unſeaſonable curioſity, and exhorting him to the diſcharge of his proper duty; and, at the ſame time, rewarding John's affection and fidelity—whence it appears that he had felt it all—by the promiſe of a long life of uſefulneſs and honour. For length of days, when diſhonoured by a ſeries of wicked actions, is certainly not to be deſired, but to be dreaded: but to live through a whole age of goodneſs, and to have the hoary head encircled with that righteouſneſs, which is a crown of glory, may juſtly be ranked among the ſignal favours of Heaven; and therefore might be properly beſtowed upon that diſciple whom Jeſus loved; whoſe diſtinguiſhed goodneſs had attracted

attracted the ſpecial friendſhip of the friend of all mankind.

Accordingly Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory informs us, that John ſurvived all the other apoſtles, and that he was about a hundred years old when he died: until which advanced period, when he could not ſupport the fatigue of delivering long diſcourſes to the people, he was ſtill carried, every Lord's-day, to the place where they aſſembled; and, like a dying father to his beloved offſpring, continued to repeat theſe characteriſtic words—"My little children, "love one another *." Nor was it unbecoming the friend of Jeſus, to ſpend his laſt breath in expreſſions of kindneſs; and even when he could no longer ſpeak, by looks and geſtures at leaſt, expreſſive of the ſpirit of his maſter,

* Jerom in Ep. ad Galat.

to

to diffuſe the ſame ſpirit through the hearts of all around him.

If we inquire, with the generous purpoſe of emulating his character, by what means the apoſtle attained ſuch excellence as gained him the firſt rank among the friends of Jeſus.—In the firſt place, he was, no doubt, born with a moſt winning gentleneſs and nobleneſs of mind. Nature had formed his heart to embrace ſo divine a teacher, and to reverence the doctrine which flowed from his lips. Then he had enjoyed the moſt intimate acceſs to Jeſus, and drawn from his converſe and example, the pure ſentiments and manners of Heaven.

More eſpecially, when John appeared in that amiable light, which we have been conſidering, it was not long after he had attended his maſter in his laſt ſufferings. During that moving ſcene

Jeſus had diſtinguiſhed him, by committing to his care his beloved mother, and bequeathing to each the ſhare which he himſelf had in their affection. While this parting addreſs yet ſounded in his ears, the tomb had given up his loſt maſter, and he had gazed with delightful wonder on thoſe eyes which beamed upon him full of tenderneſs, from the croſs. From ſcenes of piercing woe, to the moſt elevated joy, the tranſition had been ſhort. Every vein of his heart bled before; and now every nerve thrilled with tranſport. At this moment, his ſoul was full. The image of his maſter engroſſed it all; and the world with its allurements and rors was forgotten.

Did we, like John, direct our views more ſtedfaſtly to the author and finiſher of our faith—penetrated by the aſpect of our Lord expiring on the croſs, and warmed by the hope of beholding

holding and of ſharing in his glory—we could not be ſo cold, ſo languid, in his cauſe——Deep compunction would ſeize the ſoul; pride would be humbled to the duſt; ſin would no longer wear the face of pleaſure; no joys would fire the ſoul but the ſpotleſs joys of holineſs; the vanities of the world would diſappear. Conſcious of our high deſcent and glorious deſtination, we ſhould anticipate even on earth the exalted employments of heaven—while angels would look down with triumph upon thoſe who muſt ſhortly be their companions, and numbered with themſelves in glory everlaſting.

SERMON XV.

ON HABIT.

Rom. vi. 16. *Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourſelves ſervants to obey, his ſervants ye are to whom ye obey: whether of ſin unto death, or of obedience—unto righteouſneſs?*

THAT is—as the original word was probably intended to denote—"unto "juſtification or ſalvation?" And can there be a more awakening truth—a truth more deeply founded in the conſtitution of the human mind, or more confirmed by univerſal experience than this—that, as whoſoever committeth ſin is the ſervant of ſin; and whoſoever is obedient to the commands, becometh the ſervant of God; ſo it is impoſſible to paſs, at pleaſure, from the ſervice of the

one to that of the other; but thoſe who have once entered upon, and eſpecially who have been long engaged in, either courſe, are naturally led on from one ſtage of it to another, till it terminates in life or death eternal!

This reſults from the great law of Habit, whereby men are moulded into the various characters which they reſpectively poſſeſs; and, from being at firſt pliant and flexible, are at laſt unalterably fixed in that form which they have long aſſumed. Some leading views and predominant inclinations never fail to take poſſeſſion of the heart: theſe communicate their peculiar bias to the conduct: and thus every individual is at length conſtituted a virtuous or a vicious being. We become the ſervants of that power which we obey; "whether of ſin unto "death, or of righteouſneſs unto eter-"nal life."

Of

Of this great law of our nature it is my deſign at preſent to treat—to illuſtrate the Divine wiſdom in appointing it; t odeſcribe the manner of its operation; to prove the certainty and magnitude of its effects; and to ſhew the influence which all theſe conſiderations ſhould have upon our practice.

That this conſtitution of the human mind is a wiſe one, we may be convinced by attending to that proportion which is preſerved between the growth of habit and the progreſs of reaſon. Both are, in the firſt ſtage, extremely feeble. But as habit gains ſtrength, reaſon is all the while advancing to maturity: and it is not till reaſon has had ample time for deliberation, that the dominion of habit becomes fully eſtabliſhed.

The characters of men are, therefore, in a conſiderable degree, of their own forming. They may cheriſh good diſpoſi-

tions, and reſiſt the impulſe of bad ones. Virtue and vice are both ſet openly before them. Reaſon admoniſhes and perſuades to embrace the former, and reject the latter. But let them chuſe which they will, after a certain time, Habit will oblige them to adhere to their choice; and they will find themſelves impelled onwards by a force which they know not how to reſiſt.

If it be objected that by means of this law ſome are held faſt in the fetters of vice, without any proſpect of eſcaping; we ſhould remember, that this alone could give ſtability to virtue; or indeed any degree of conſiſtency to human characters; and conſequently that without this law we ſhould never know what to expect either from others or from ourſelves:—our lives would be a courſe of disjointed, irregular actions, and every paſſion would govern in its turn: all moral

moral and religious improvement would be cut off; nor could any one riſe above the firſt efforts of undiſciplined nature. But through the law of Habit, as ſome doubtleſs ſink into great degeneracy; ſo others riſe to proportionable excellence, and goodneſs becomes the fixed character of their ſouls. This certainly bears all the marks of a proceſs carrying on for the advancement of our ſpecies to a more glorious and happy ſtate: a proceſs by which many are formed to the greateſt dignity of virtue—are prepared to co-operate with God himſelf in his benevolent deſigns, and to partake of conſummate happineſs in his bliſsful preſence. As ſome "yield themſelves ſervants of ſin unto "death;" ſo others "yield themſelves "ſervants of righteouſneſs unto eternal "life." And what can give us a more enlarged view of the wiſdom and goodneſs of the Eternal Providence?

Let us proceed to conſider, in what manner the law of Habit operates upon the human character. The firſt effect of it is, to familiarize the mind either with vice or virtue; and, of conſequence, to diminiſh the horrors of the one, or the difficulties of the other. The path of virtue is, at the beginning, rugged and ſteep; but habit ſoon renders it eaſy, and at length delightful. The further we advance, the leſs we experience of ſelf-denial and conſtraint, and the nearer we approach to unallayed happineſs. The firſt ſteps of vice, on the other hand, are attended with ſhame and remorſe; and it is not without trembling reluctance that we ſuffer ourſelves to be impelled by our paſſions. But the front of habitual guilt cannot bluſh, and the conſcience which has been ſeared feels no longer the ſenſibilities of virtue.

In the ſecond place, Habit, as it is exerted in favour of virtue or of vice, fills

fills the mind with a train of correſponding ideas and impreſſions. In the good man's breaſt, the current of thought, like a chryſtal ſtream, reflects nothing but images of virtue. There recollection feaſts upon paſt obſtacles ſurmounted, and paſſions overcome: new plans of goodneſs ſpring up perpetually of their own accord: and the conſcious peace of innocence keeps the ſoul ſtedfaſt and immoveable. In the breaſt of the vicious man, the whole current of thought is polluted. When he reflects upon the paſt, it preſents to him ſuch ſcenes as tend to obſcure the light of reaſon, and ſet the paſſions on fire. When he looks forward to the future, freſh ſchemes of unlawful gratification ariſe. His mind is crowded with a conſtant ſucceſſion of unhallowed thoughts—whence corrupt deſires, and wicked actions, inevitably enſue.

Add

Add to this, that while Habit thus tinges the whole compaſs of the imagination, it ſeems to operate further, by a kind of mechanical influence. For, if we take a view of mankind in their general courſe of action, we ſhall find, that even when they have loſt ſight of thoſe inducements which firſt prompted them to act, they ſtill perſevere through the force of cuſtom. There muſt indeed be ſome object to engage the mind at firſt in any purſuit; but, when once engaged, it moves onward of its own accord. It is carried along without the aid of reflection; nor can be diverted from the accuſtomed path, without ſome degree of painful violence.

Such is the nature and the operation of the law of Habit. Let us now conſider the certainty of its effects; its conſtant progreſs; and the difficulty of ſubduing it, when grown inveterate.

As no object can paſs through the mind without leaving ſome impreſſion; ſo, if this impreſſion be pleaſurable, it creates affection; if painful, averſion. In conſequence of theſe ſentiments, we become ſtrongly inclined to purſue or to avoid the objects which reſpectively excite them; and at length contract a certain bent which reſembles the original impulſes of nature.—Do we not perceive the actual operation of habit through the world? Has not every individual of the human race a certain fixed character which diſtinguiſhes him from the reſt of the ſpecies? And is not this character, for the moſt part, evidently the reſult of that courſe of action to which he has been accuſtomed? Even thoſe characters of which irreſolution and inconſtancy are the predominant features, become ſuch, through the force of habit. They have long accuſtomed themſelves to wander from object to object, and to purſue none with ſteadineſs. And even

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men who are leaſt affected by any immediate ſenſations or mechanical impulſes, and never act but with deliberation, are under the ſame general law. For it is becauſe they have early formed the habit of deliberating: and therefore to pauſe, to examine, to reflect, is juſt as natural to them, as it is to others to act without thinking at all.—In ſhort, the laws of vegetation are not more certain than the law of habit. As ſurely as the twig hardens into the trunk, and retains the direction which it aſſumed at firſt, ſo ſurely will the habitual propenſities of the boy operate upon the youth; thoſe of the youth upon the man, and hang a powerful bias upon his whole life to come.

Moreover, the influence of habit is not only certain, but continually increaſing. For as every paſſing thought leaves behind it an impreſſion; ſo the more frequently any train of thoughts paſſes through

through the mind, the deeper will be that impreſſion: and when this is ſufficiently ſtrong to put in motion the active powers, it muſt neceſſarily be increaſed by every effort we exert. Since therefore, through life, we are engaged in perpetual action; our habits muſt be perpetually growing. Unperceived even by ourſelves, inclinations or averſions are ever riſing, multiplying, and ſtrengthening. A thouſand inviſible bands are every moment winding round the ſoul. We become inſenſibly more and more attached to the courſe which we have adopted; and the objects of our purſuit become more and more neceſſary to our happineſs. In ſhort, every act we perform, every thought we indulge, leads to innumerable others; and rapid as the growth of habit is from the beginning, it advances with accelerated rapidity through every ſtage of its progreſs.

Let

Let us then briefly conſider the force which habit is capable of acquiring at laſt. In proceſs of time the mind is tinctured throughout by its favourite occupations and purſuits. The imagination is crowded with thoſe objects on which it has long delighted to dwell. The paſſions are craving perpetually their wonted indulgences; and if they are not gratified, keep the mind in a ſtate of conſtant uneaſineſs: nor can we form any conception of the power which they have acquired, till we come to oppoſe them. Hence ſome men trifle on the borders of vice, till they are lulled into a fatal ſlumber, and remain unconſcious of their bondage, till they awake and find themſelves in chains not to be broken. While others, by a ſteady courſe of determined virtue, even though that virtue has never been exerciſed with any extraordinary trials, have gradually riſen to a ſtrength and greatneſs of mind, which has aſtoniſhed both others and themſelves.

themſelves.—Perhaps the moſt exalted, as well as abandoned characters that ever exiſted, have ſprung from inconſiderable beginnings. From ſome trifling inſtance of reſignation or ſelf-denial, ſcarcely worthy to be mentioned, and apparently conſigned to immediate oblivion, may have riſen the confeſſor and the martyr: as it is well known that men, who have been the bane of ſociety, and the diſgrace of their ſpecies, have frequently acknowledged, that what laid the foundation of their crimes was ſome ſmall deviation from the rules of virtue.

If then Habit be thus certain in its growth, thus rapid in its progreſs, and at laſt thus difficult to be rooted out, with how much caution ſhould we guard againſt the Beginnings of evil! Vice is a Whirlpool. Whoever ventures within the ſphere of its attraction, is in danger of being drawn to the centre, and ſwallowed up in the abyſs.

But

But who is conſcious of never offending And is it not enough to make us tremble, that the man who commits one ſingle wrong action, may certainly be drawn into the commiſſion of a ſecond; that, without deep repentance, and redoubled vigilance, he will be more eaſily betrayed into a third; and may thus be inſenſibly led on to the extremes of wickedneſs!—The only ſecurity we can have, is to check every vicious paſſion in its riſe; to form good habits betimes; and to think nothing of little conſequence, which has the ſmalleſt tendency to corrupt or to improve the ſentiments and diſpoſitions of the heart.

More eſpecially, in early life of what unſpeakable importance is it to inure the mind to virtue! This gay ſeaſon is, beyond all others, momentous; and thoſe bloſſoms which it produces, ſo liable to be ſcattered by the winds, and to be blaſted in their beauty, contain

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tain all the hopes and promiſes of the year.—You who are parents, will you not lend a willing hand to cultivate the tender plants which nature has committed to your care? You who are in the days of youth, will you not ſtrive to keep your minds, as yet unblemiſhed, without a ſtain? How then will you be able to extirpate the canker of bad habits, when they are become inveterate? For no bribe which this world can offer, be prevailed upon to quit the cheerful days and peaceful ſlumbers of innocence. Engrave upon the tablet of your hearts the characters of wiſdom and goodneſs, not of folly and wickedneſs; and remember, that they are characters deſtined to remain for ever!

With reſpect to thoſe who are ſo unhappy as to have yielded already to the temptations of vice, it is evident from the foregoing obſervations, that if they wiſh ever to return to the path of virtue,

they muſt return without delay. Shortly, the broad ſeal of habit will affix the irreverſible ſtamp. "He who is holy, will "be holy ſtill; and he who is unholy, "will be unholy ſtill." Every penitential tear will be dried up; and every ray of heavenly light extinguiſhed. The mind will remain inſenſible to goodneſs; hardened againſt remorſe; and dead in treſpaſſes and ſins.

But even ſhould the ſinner be awakened to reflection before it is abſolutely too late, yet in what ſtruggles muſt that man be engaged who has ſuffered bad habits to grow inveterate! Sinful inclinations will be ever riſing; and it is painful either to ſuppreſs or to indulge them. Sometimes his reſolution fails, and he ſuffers himſelf to be vanquiſhed. This renews his remorſe: his days paſs in uneaſy ſuſpence; and every pleaſure becomes taſteleſs. By degrees he is lulled into a dangerous ſecurity:

rity: the paſſions are huſhed into a deceitful calm: and a faint trembling joy dawns upon his mind. But no ſooner does he begin to remit his vigilance, than he is again ſurpriſed and overthrown. The ſeeds of vicious inclinations had ſprung up unawares: his former habits were only reſtrained for a ſeaſon, not extirpated; and the fabric of virtue, which with ſo much pains and ſolicitude he had endeavoured to rear, is laid in ruins. Tired with ſo many ineffectual efforts, he either gives up every purpoſe of amendment in deſpair; or if he ſtill bravely continues the conflict, yet his anxious mind can know no reſt, till he has attained to a more ſettled and eſtabliſhed ſtate.

How happy, then, is the man who poſſeſſes confirmed habits of goodneſs! What ſecurity, and what tranquillity does he enjoy! He refrains from wickedneſs, not through conſtraint, but choice: not becauſe of the puniſhment

annexed to it, but becauſe his ſoul abhors it: and he performs his duty, not as an irkſome taſk, which he dares not neglect, but becauſe it is his happineſs, becauſe he loves it, and cannot do otherwiſe. Temptations have loſt the power not only to ſhake the firmneſs of his virtue, but to ruffle his peace. He moves on with eaſe and dignity in the path of reaſon, amidſt the harmony of the paſſions. No harſh diſcord riſes within his ſoul. Goodneſs is his proper element. Large is the harveſt of happineſs which he reaps himſelf: and his courſe through the world is marked with extenſive uſefulneſs. How amiable, how honourable, how pleaſant, is ſuch a life! How full of hope at the beginning! What generous vigour and activity in its progreſs! And what peaceful reflections at the cloſe!

It opens like the cheerful morning of an unclouded day, which gradually brightens to meridian ſplendour—then

ſoftens inſenſibly into the mild luſtre of evening, and leaves the heavens in a glow at its departure. Thus, my brethren, may your minds be ennobled by new acceſſions of wiſdom and goodneſs; and your lives crowned with increaſing uſefulneſs and honour:—that in full maturity of every moral excellence, you may quit this tranſitory ſtate, that your memories may be bleſſed through ſucceeding generations, and that your ſpirits may "ſhine as the brightneſs of "the firmament, and as the ſtars, for "ever and ever."

SERMON XVI.

ON THE PROGRESSION OF TRUTH AND VIRTUE.

John xvii. 17. *Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*

At the close of our Saviour's ministry on earth, no prayer could have been offered up by him with greater propriety, than that which is contained in the weighty and comprehensive words of the text.

It was indeed as natural as it was becoming, for one who had devoted his life to the advancement of truth and goodness, to commend the result of his labours to the Supreme Being; and, if

we may ſo ſpeak, to devolve the important charge into thoſe great and merciful hands, whence he received it.

This prayer, therefore, ſo evidently flowing from an enlightened benevolence as well as ſublime piety, and addreſſed to God with perfect confidence in his paternal adminiſtration, while it reflects the higheſt honour on our Saviour's character, is replete with the moſt encouraging and delightful expectations to every friend of the human race.

As the happineſs of mankind undeniably depends upon virtue; ſo all virtue is founded upon truth. Every obligation implies the knowledge of thoſe grounds on which it reſts. He that "cometh to God," muſt be previouſly convinced of his Exiſtence, and of his Excellence. He that would adorn his ſtation as a member of ſociety, muſt learn to conſider mankind as his brethren,

thren, and be convinced that on reciprocal fidelity and kindneſs depends the common happineſs.

Infatuated by his ſenſes and appetites, man is prone to a thouſand hurtful illuſions. Wrapt in private gratification, every one imagines himſelf to be the centre of the univerſe. Hence we graſp with eagerneſs whatever promiſes to give happineſs to ourſelves, however inconſiſtent with the happineſs of others; and the whole courſe of nature appears a ſcene of confuſion, when it jars with our own diſcordant paſſions. But when, guided by the light of truth, we draw near to the footſtool of the throne of God; behold him diſpenſing bleſſings to his univerſal family, with an impartial hand,—and, under this impreſſion, contemplate, as far as we are capable, the vaſt whole, as it appears to him; we are then reduced, in our own imagination, to that ſmall ſpace which we occupy in reality;

reality: we are conſtrained to acknowledge and to feel, that others have an equal claim to happineſs with ourſelves; and are irreſiſtibly led to expect the favour of our common Father, according to the equity and kindneſs which we ſhew to our brethren.

That the manners of men therefore may be reclaimed, and their characters formed to goodneſs; it is neceſſary, that their ſentiments ſhould be rectified, and that their underſtandings ſhould be enlightened. This was the ſcope of our Saviour's divine miſſion; and, ſo far as wiſe and good men have hitherto been capable of judging, this is the great aim of the Supreme Being in all his diſpenſations.—The plan of Providence and that of Chriſtianity perfectly accord; ſince it is the deſign of both to enlighten, ſanctify, and bleſs mankind; a deſign which it is indeed worthy of Infinite Goodneſs to form; and which, conduct-

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ed as it undoubtedly is, by unerring wiſdom and irreſiſtible power, cannot fail of being at laſt completely accompliſhed.

It was no vain prayer, therefore, which our Saviour offered to his Heavenly Father in the text: "Sanctify them through "thy truth: thy word is truth."

That there will be a period when the powers of the human mind ſhall be more completely unfolded, the general ſtate of ſociety wonderfully improved, and all the bleſſings which ariſe from correct ſentiments, and well-regulated affections, univerſally enjoyed; we are led to hope, not only from various intimations, if not direct and full predictions, throughout the ſcriptures; but from the very nature of man, from the conſtitution of the world, and (bleſſed be God) we may add, from our own happy experience of the daily improvements which are making

making in every branch of knowledge; from the application of theſe improvements to the benefit of ſociety; and from the rapid progreſs of a liberal, humane, and candid ſpirit.

There is a vital energy in truth, which muſt at laſt gain the aſcendant over error. It has almoſt always been at firſt oppoſed with a violence, proportioned to the ignorance and barbariſm of the times. But this only prepares the way for its fuller confirmation and more general reception in the end.

When Copernicus made his diſcoveries of the true figure and motion of the earth, he was obliged to ſuppreſs them, during the courſe of his whole life. When Galileo employed the utmoſt force of genius to defend and eſtabliſh the ſyſtem which Copernicus diſcovered, and which ſhews the univerſe to be indeed the workmanſhip of an All-perfect

fect Being, he was compelled by the Inquiſition ſolemnly to retract his opinions, and was held forth to public view, not only as an ignorant pretender to ſcience, but as an heretical innovator in religion. But the truth of their ſyſtem is now generally acknowledged. Every freſh obſervation confirms it. And there can be no doubt that it will be univerſally received, and endure to the end of the world.—If this be the caſe with that kind of knowledge which is chiefly employed in adorning the underſtanding, why ſhould it not be much more ſo with that, which is of the greateſt importance to the happineſs of mankind?

If we look into the actual ſtate of the world around us, notwithſtanding the follies and vices which ſtill abound, and the effects of which being apparent and being felt, ſharpen the ſeverity of invective; yet we cannot but obſerve many pleaſing proofs of the melioration of ſociety.

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When was there an age in which ſuperſtition had leſs power? in which the principles of morality were eſtabliſhed on juſter and firmer grounds? What period can be aſſigned in which the wrongs of the oppreſſor excited ſtronger indignation, or the diſtreſſes of the unfortunate were more ſure of obtaining relief? Hence even war has aſſumed a milder aſpect: deſpotiſm has been reſtrained from rioting with its ancient Wantonneſs of barbarity in the miſeries of mankind: and tyrants themſelves have been compelled to liſten to the voice of humanity.

Nor need we confine our attention to moral improvements merely.

The wonderful extenſion of commerce, whereby almoſt all nations are united, the products of various climates interchanged, arts and ſciences diſſeminated, and mankind formed into one brotherhood, every member of which contributes

butes to the well-being of the reſt,—certainly opens to the benevolent mind a grand and delightful proſpect.

The daily advances alſo which are making in the knowledge of nature, and uſeful arts, give birth to a thouſand conveniences, a thouſand pleaſures before unknown; which being tranſmitted from nation to nation, and from age to age, muſt be continually ſoftening the evils and multiplying the comforts of life, embelliſhing the face of the world, and increaſing the general ſtock of happineſs.

One mortifying reflection, however, we are conſtrained to make,—that there is ſcarcely any ſpecies of good which is not accompanied with ſome evil; and what is ſtill more humiliating, ſcarcely even a virtue, which is not in danger of betraying us into ſome vice. For as the bleſſings of affluence too often tend to luxury, ſo the noble ſpirit of liberty and independance

independence is prone to degenerate into lawleſs riot; diſſipation and licentiouſneſs enter through the channels of liberal and poliſhed manners; and no ſooner are we emancipated from ſuperſtition, than we are in danger of growing indifferent to the moſt important truths.

Without ſtopping to inquire at preſent—which however well deſerves the moſt deliberate inquiry—whether theſe ſymptoms be obſervable in the preſent improved ſtate of ſociety, we may hope that the improvements, which are ſo conſpicuous, will be cultivated, and be laſting; and that their attendant evils, naturally calling forth the ſagacity and exertions of mankind to remedy or to remove them, will be comparatively of ſhort duration. For, as there is a healing power in nature, which counteracts the diſeaſes of the body, and the pain and uneaſineſs accompanying them, impel us to ſeek relief; ſo the diſorders of the mind create ſo much perſonal

ſonal and ſocial unhappineſs, as muſt call forth all the wiſdom and ſagacity of man to inveſtigate and apply their proper remedies.

As a proof of this, of what ſignal advantage to the cauſe both of natural and revealed religion have been the aſſaults and objections of their adverſaries! In conſequence of theſe, how much better are they now underſtood, and on how much firmer a foundation do they ſtand! Yet who that has in any degree felt the power of truth and virtue, but muſt conſider it as an evil, that there ſhould ever have ariſen human beings, liable to all the ſufferings of mortality, who have ſpurned at the awful diſcovery of a future ſtate, the everlaſting obligations of virtue, and even the Majeſty of God himſelf! This is an evil, however, which, like all others, tends ultimately to the improvement and happineſs of mankind. If the truth had never been openly oppoſed, it would not

have been ſo entirely ſeparated from error. If its advocates had not been perſecuted, their integrity would not have ſtood ſo clear of ſuſpicion. It is neceſſary that offences ſhould come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.

And thus we may hope, and reaſonably conclude, that error, vice, and miſery, are mortal and ſelf-deſtructive; are gradually declining; and will at length expire in the univerſal prevalence of truth, virtue, and happineſs: For theſe form that common intereſt of all beings, which it appears to be the grand aim of the Greateſt and Wiſeſt to promote, and which, conſequently, will go on advancing for ever.

We ſee not indeed the progreſs of the vaſt deſign through every intermediate ſtage. We cannot trace it through every ſucceſſive moment, as it is gradually unfolded. Nevertheleſs, the counſels of providence muſt ſtand, and the courſe of nature

nature muſt be in a real, though imperceptible, progreſſion towards that full maturity, which was the original deſign of the Supreme Intelligence.—As to one who ſtands on the ſea-ſhore at the riſing of the tide, the waves appear to be repelled and re-abſorbed in the maſs of waters; yet return with increaſing force, and continually riſe higher, till they have reached their utmoſt limits; ſo Virtue and Happineſs are perpetually advancing, and the plan of Providence is carrying forward to its completion; though frail human beings, whoſe views extend but to a ſpan, and whoſe lives are but a moment, may imagine, from temporary diſaſters and local misfortunes, that all things are ruſhing into confuſion, and that Eternal Wiſdom hath abandoned its own works.

A ſmall part of the world comparatively hath as yet been enlightened by the Chriſtian religion. How much ſmaller a part hath embraced the Chriſtian faith in

its purity! Even where the truth ſhines brighteſt, how feeble is its influence upon great numbers! Yet who that conſiders Chriſtianity in the ſtrength of its Evidence, the excellency of its Morals, and the greatneſs of its Rewards, can entertain a doubt that there are reſources to be drawn from this, beyond all other doctrines for enlightening our ignorance, for ſtrengthening our weakneſs, and raiſing human virtue and happineſs to their higheſt perfection? May we not hence conclude with high probability, as our Saviour ſeems very ſtrongly to intimate, that this religion ſhall be to all future generations of mankind, the great ſpring of knowledge, virtue, and happineſs? As ſuch it muſt therefore appear to that Great Being by whom it has been ſo wonderfully preſerved and conveyed through ages of perſecution and violence to the preſent time; and to whom all the glorious effects which it ſhall hereafter produce, in the period of its happieſt and moſt extenſive

ſive influence, are equally conſpicuous, as if they were preſent. And notwithſtanding that thoſe who beheld this very ſource of truth converted into a ſyſtem of ſuperſtition, muſt occaſionally have been ready to ſink into deſpair, as if the ſun itſelf were turned into darkneſs; yet to us who have found that this was only a temporary eclipſe, and who have ſeen the dawn of a brighter day, firſt, in the glorious reformation from the errors and corruptions of the Church of Rome, and ſince that time in the increaſing light which has been thrown upon the evidences and doctrines of truth—to us it is natural to look forward with pleaſing expectation that ſtill clearer light will be ſtruck out by the prevalence of free inquiry, and that in proportion to the progreſs of knowledge mankind will advance with an accelerated courſe to virtue and to happineſs.

It is in this evident progreſſion of our ſpecies, this undeniable melioration of ſo-

ciety, this irreſiſtible tendency of all nature towards improvement and perfection that we muſt look for the moſt ſhining proofs of the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of Divine Providence. We muſt not confine our attention to the actual ſtate of the univerſe, and contemplate only the firſt dawning light, intermingled with miſts and darkneſs, but chiefly direct our view to the meridian brightneſs of futurity.

And if there be a ſuperior mind, which is intereſted in the progreſs of human nature, and which preſides over, guides, and controls the courſe of human affairs; what bounds can we ſet to our hopes and expectations of improvement! or what proſpect can the ſublimeſt imagination form that reaſon will not abundantly juſtify!

When we extend our view through the lengthening fields of futurity, what white, unblemiſhed days, may be yet reſerved for

for our unhappy, guilty race! Let but Reaſon gain that aſcendant, to which it is ever tending; let but Chriſtianity obtain that dominion over our underſtandings and hearts, to which it is ſo juſtly entitled; and what a glorious ſcene muſt enſue! In this caſe, all that is Great and Glorious and happy muſt undoubtedly be realized even upon earth.

Hence it appears how little reaſon we have to fear that either the power or policy of man, will be able to defeat, or even to obſtruct, the counſels of Providence. 'The counſel of God ſhall ſtand for ever, 'and the gates of hell ſhall not prevail 'againſt it.

Vain are all endeavours to check the natural and ſalutary operation of the human underſtanding; to cruſh the riſing ſpirit of improvement, and to immortalize ſuperſtition and error. The refined and ſubtile eſſence of truth eludes the tyrannical

control of man. Lodged in the receſſes of the ſoul, it eſcapes all human obſervation. There it is cheriſhed and foſtered in ſecret. Thence inevitably it will be communicated from mind to mind, and by degrees riſe to ſuch accumulated ſtrength as no earthly force ſhall be able to withſtand.—Even at this hour, the human mind is every where expanding, and has begun to burſt the ſhackles both of tyranny and ſuperſtition. And ſhall man, feeble man, attempt to ſtem the torrent of univerſal nature, or to oppoſe the decree of Omnipotence!

In what manner the Divine counſels are carried into effect, is partly revealed, partly hid from our view. God has ten thouſand inſtruments every moment at his command.

He can either employ thoſe General Laws of nature which are already eſtabliſhed, or reverſe them, at his pleaſure.

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He can either act by the intervention of ſecondary agents, or pour forth the irreſiſtible tide of his own immediate energy. Man, however, is commonly employed, as the inſtrument of good to man. By the force of inſtruction, example, and ſympathy, Truth and Goodneſs are communicated from heart to heart, and theſe are the chief means which Providence appoints and uſes to reclaim the world. Nor can any generous exertion of the underſtanding, or intention of the heart, under the auſpicious aid of infinite Wiſdom, be wholly unavailing. The feebleſt inſtruments, in the hand of God, are omnipotent, and oppoſite cauſes combine in producing the ſame glorious effect. Even Vice and Folly are compelled to ſubſerve the purpoſes of Wiſdom and Goodneſs. And in the midſt of Darkneſs, Providence is ſecretly preparing for periods the moſt enlightened and glorious. 'Surely the wrath of man ſhall 'praiſe thee, and the remainder of wrath 'wilt thou reſtrain.'

How much more, then, may the Wiſe and Good, who directly and voluntarily co-operate with God, hope, that their ſtrenuous and unwearied efforts will not be fruitleſs; but, that all ſhall work together for good, and that the iſſue ſhall be glorious for themſelves, and happy for the creation?

Let theſe conſiderations encourage us to be active, reſolute, and zealous in every good work. Let every one endeavour to ſtore his underſtanding with knowledge, and enrich his heart with virtue. Let every one bear his teſtimony to Truth, and recommend it by the purity of his example. Whatever is conducive to the Glory of God, which conſiſts in the perfection and happineſs of his creatures, let us purſue with unſhaken reſolution, according to the talents which we have received, and the ſtations in which we are placed. But above all things let us be careful that we be indeed actuated by true

piety and benevolence, and that no ignoble paſſion mingle with theſe divine principles; remembering, that no external applauſe can come into competition with the teſtimony of our own conſciences, becauſe this alone will follow us to the tribunal of Omnipotence, and by this will be decided the allotments of eternity.

THE END.

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